OCTOBER 30th ISSUE, 1924
VOL. XLIX No. 3

ADVENTURE

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Adventure

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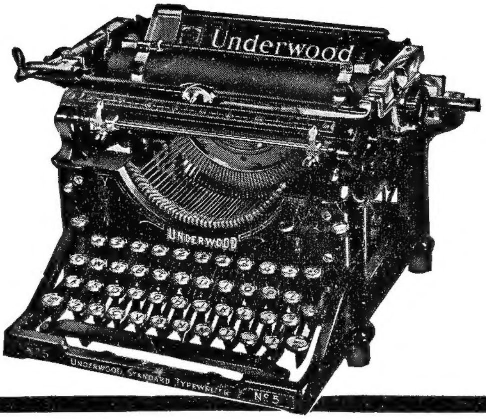

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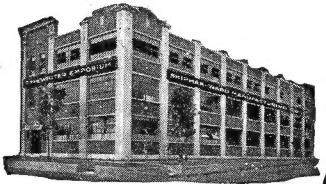

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Luscious and Enticing

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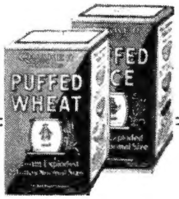
To children Quaker Puffed Wheat brings the nourishment of whole grains with the richness of a rare confection; to adults an almost perfect food. Quickly digested and assimilated; kernels steam exploded, with every food cell broken.

An energy food of fairy delight—yet with vitamines, bran and minerals in balanced combination.

Quaker Puffed Rice, Also

Whole rice kernels, steam exploded to 8 times normal size, like the Puffed Wheat. Dainty morsels so light and inviting you would never dream they could be so nutritious.

Quaker
Puffed Wheat



Quaker
Puffed Rice

ADVENTURE
Oct. 30th, 1924

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Volume 49
Number 3

Mind-health, first

DO you know about the new phase of warfare against disease called Mental Hygiene? It is teaching people to guard their *mental* health—just as they have been taught to guard their *physical* health.

Physical health depends to a great extent upon mental health. Excessive anger, hatred, envy, jealousy, fear, revolt, malice—a hundred and one mental conflicts if persisted in—often cause serious mental and physical trouble. With continuing wrong thoughts and emotions we can't be well. That is one of the first things that Mental Hygiene teaches. Its underlying idea is as old as Time. The only new thing about it is that it has now been developed into a science that can be used to prevent mind-sickness and to solve individual mental problems.

Frequently people who are ill take remedy after remedy, travel north, south, east or west—all to no avail. Why? Because the *source* of the trouble—wrong thinking, false beliefs, distorted imagination, misdirected emotion—never has been touched. Such illnesses are not physical diseases although they may be accompanied by physical pain and may be manifested by sleeplessness, nervousness, indigestion and many other physical symptoms.

If you were physically ill—if anyone in your family were threatened with diphtheria or scarlet fever—you would do something about it. Mental sickness is quite as real and likewise should have prompt attention.

There are men and women—graduate physicians—trained especially to treat troubles of the mind and to teach Mental Hygiene. Their work is known as psychiatry and all over the country wise and successful physicians are practicing it.

Dr. William J. Mayo, of the Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minn., says that mental ailments are the cause of more misery than tuberculosis or cancer.

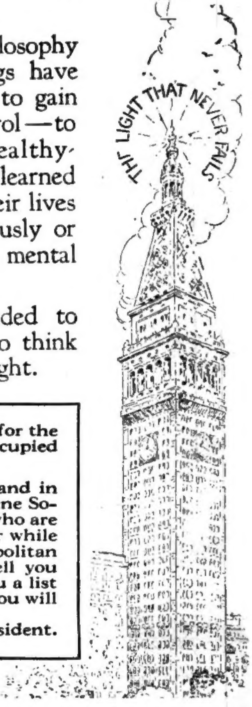
If you are feeling ill and find no physical reason for your discomfort, your doctor may discover that the real trouble is with your mind. This may be true, also, of those who have difficulty in maintaining a happy personal relationship with family, friends or business associates. Chronic worriers and pessimists show evidence of unhealthy mental operations.

Frequently it is possible to straighten out your own mental difficulties. Sometimes talking them over with some wise man or woman who is by nature a mental hygienist will help to solve the problem. If you have a serious trouble do not keep it bottled up. Repression often is harmful.

Associate with happy, normal people. Exercise and have all the fun you can. Don't devote every minute to work. Take time for recreation — *re*-creation.

For centuries religion, philosophy and inspirational writings have helped men and women to gain poise and mental control—to know themselves. Healthy-minded people who have learned how to plan and direct their lives harmoniously are consciously or unconsciously employing mental hygiene.

Mental Hygiene is needed to help millions of people to think right, act right and feel right.


THE LIGHT THAT NEVER FAILS

The time has come when Mental Hygiene—the science of mental health—should take its place with other major activities in the great field of preventive medicine. As the work of prevention progresses, much of the mental suffering, mental deficiency, criminality and insanity in the world will be reduced.

The cost of caring for the patients in mental hospitals alone is nearly $75,000,000 a year. The economic loss, because of their disability, is more than $200,000,000 annually. In several states, one out of twenty of all people who die in adult life dies in a hospital for the insane.

The number of beds in public hospitals for the insane in this country equals those occupied by all other sick persons combined.

In 26 states in the Union, in Canada and in many European countries Mental Hygiene Societies have been formed to help those who are mentally troubled. It will be worth your while to get in touch with them. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company will gladly tell you where they are located and will mail you a list of books relating to Mental Hygiene if you will ask for it.

HALEY FISKE, President.

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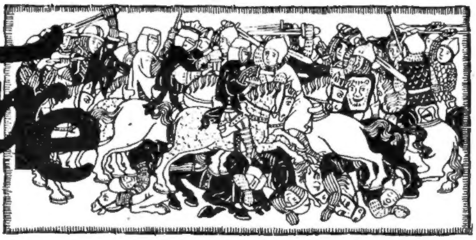

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.

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A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising sixty-four geographical sub-divisions, with special sections on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons Past and Present, Salt and Fresh Water Fishing, Forestry in the United States, Tropical Forestry, Aviation, Army Matters, United States and Foreign; American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal, First Aids on the Trail, and Health-Building Outdoors.

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Headings . . . . **George M. Richards**

Cover Design . . . . **F. Eltonhead**

One Poem, One Novel and One Novelette Complete

"AND there was talk and song of work and wages
And tales that had been echoed down the ages
From Homer and from Rabelais, and speech
Of port and city, from a South Sea beach
To Bering Straits——"

"TALES OF THE HOT DOG TAVERN" are told in verse by Berton Braley in the next issue.

THEY were both left behind when their outfits sailed for France; *Sergeant Eadie* was in the hospital, and *Jake*, the hairy and freckled, was in jail. Submarines and guard-houses notwithstanding, their one thought was to get to the other side, to *Eadie's* outfit, the best in the Army. "THE CASUAL'S RETURN," a complete novel of the World War, by Leonard H. Nason, in the next issue.

"*ONE-TWO" MAC* was in a jam. Because he insisted upon putting *Breen*, the dope smuggler, ashore he had to make a lightless landfall on a dark night—and his chronometers were out of kilter. "EIGHT SECONDS," a complete novelette of the sea, by John Webb in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

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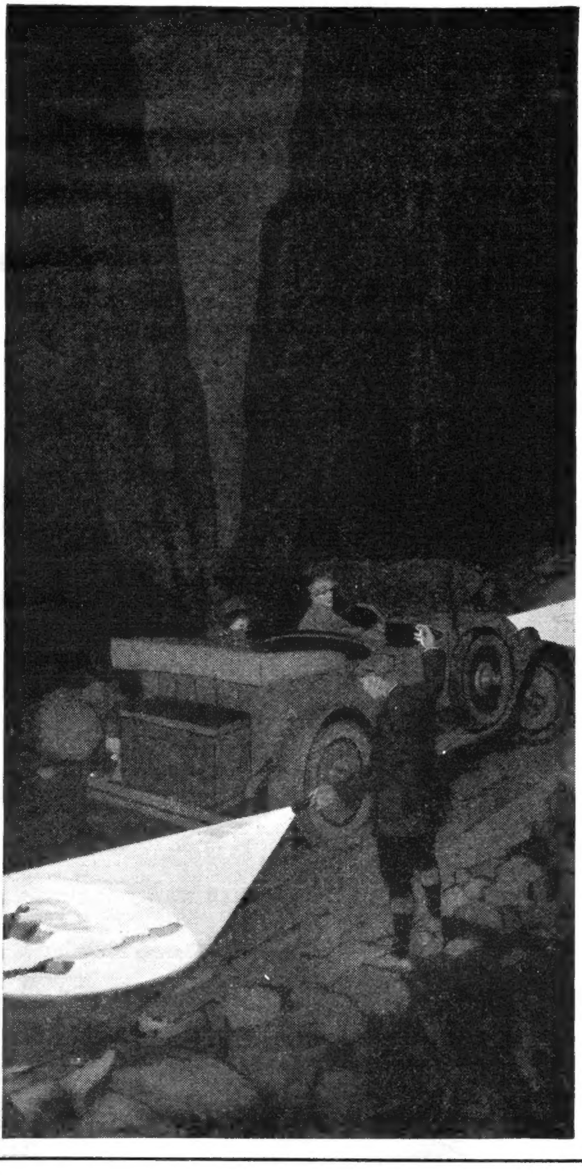
Backing around at night—*use your flashlight!*



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PITCH-BLACK night . . . narrow, high-crowned road. To back around, use your flashlight! Avoid ditches and dark embankments.

Use your Eveready to examine the carburetor. Play safe. Use it to see how much gas is in the tank. (You could safely poke a lighted Eveready into a barrel of gasoline!) Use it to change a tire, to find the jack or pliers, to put the curtains on.

The long-range Evereadys are great for motoring. Shoot a beam 200, 300 or 500 feet, depending on which focusing type you select. Read road-signs with them without leaving the car.

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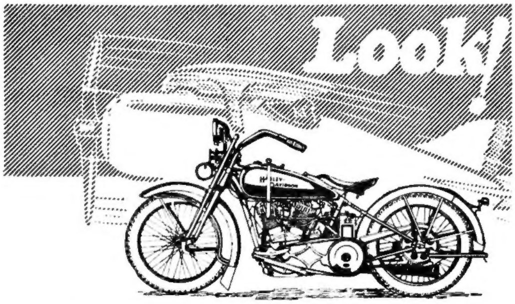

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New Truss-Loop Frame

New Riding Comfort

New Lower Price

New Larger Tanks

SPEED in every line—strength in every curve—low-hung for safety and easy control—better-sprung and bigger-tired for luxurious comfort—that's Harley-Davidson's latest and greatest motorcycle, the "Stream-Line"!

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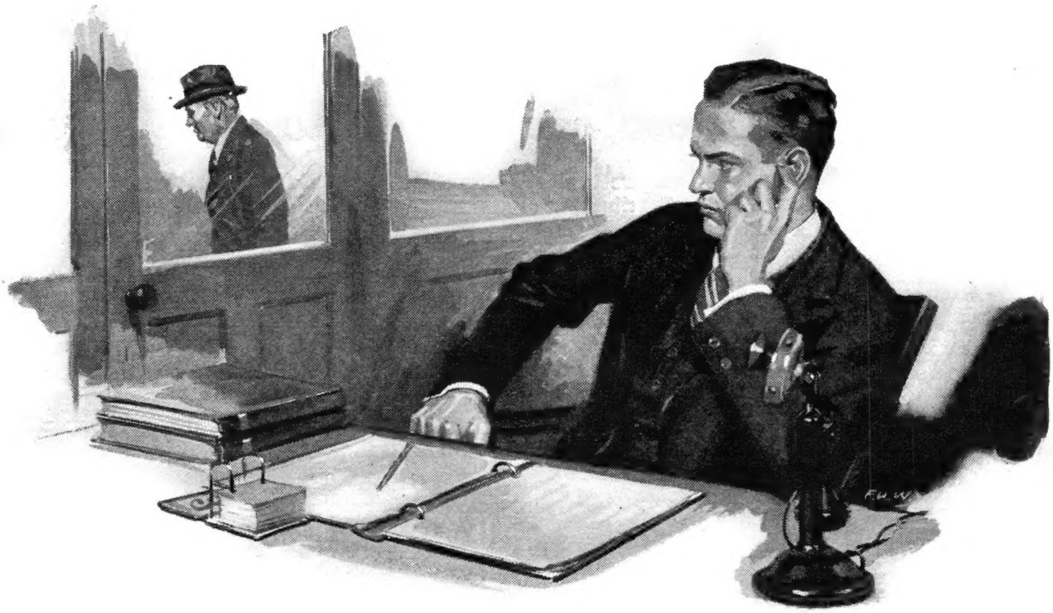

"What would I do if I lost my job?"

WHAT *would* you do? What would your wife and children do?

Suppose your employer notified you tomorrow that he didn't need you any longer? Have you any idea where you could get another position?

You wouldn't have to worry if you were a trained man. You wouldn't have to spend your mornings reading the "Want Ads" and then trudging from place to place, meeting rebuffs and discouragements, piling up bills, finally willing "to do anything" if only you could get on somebody's payroll.

Don't have this spectre of unemployment hanging over your head forever. Train yourself to do some one thing so well that your services will be in demand. Employers don't discharge such men. They *promote* them!

Decide to-day that you are going to get the specialized training you must have if you are ever going to get a real job and a real salary. It is easy if you really try.

Right at home, in the odds and ends of spare time that now go to waste, you can prepare for the position you want in the work you like best. For the International Correspondence Schools will train you just as they are training thousands of other men—no matter where you live—no matter what your circumstances.

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This simple food has given it to thousands

THESE remarkable reports are typical of thousands of similar tributes to Fleischmann's Yeast. There is nothing mysterious about its action. It is not a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense. But when the body is choked with the poisons of constipation—or when its vitality is low so that skin, stomach and general health are affected—this simple, natural food achieves literally amazing results.

Concentrated in every cake of Fleischmann's Yeast are millions of tiny yeast-plants, alive and active. At once they go to work—invigorating the whole system, clearing the skin, aiding digestion, strengthening the intestinal muscles and making them healthy and active.

"*I believe that I am a pioneer* in the Yeast-for-Health habit. I was one of those unfortunate youngsters who are neither sick nor well. I had a very poor appetite, and my mother humored me when she discovered that I liked yeast. (This was years ago.) It was not very long before the yeast started to take effect. . . . I had a desire to play. My body seemed to grow stronger, and my mother said that I was like a new child. I have been using Fleischmann's Yeast ever since, whenever I felt the need of a regulator—a matter of thirteen years."

(*Miss Laura Banker, Albany, N. Y.*)

"*After several years'* strenuous work of studying I faced a new position with lowered resistance and depleted nerve force, and a splotchy, yellow complexion. Frankly, I scoffed at the idea of yeast helping, but the first benefit I noticed was—a long-standing chronic constipation relieved. Next, a clear complexion that was a surprise to my friends. In two months I faced life cheerfully, buoyantly and confidently."

(*Miss Alice D. Nelson, Wilmington, Del.*)

"*For two years* I was never free from boils. While touring with the *Irene* Company one broke out on my chin which caused my whole neck to swell and turn purple. The hotel doctor said that if I would take fresh yeast and would keep taking it he would guarantee I would never have another boil. I started right in taking Fleischmann's Yeast and in two days the boil was drying up. That doctor told the truth: I have never had a boil since."

(*Mr. M. W. Robertshaw, New York City*)

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Dissolve one cake in a glass of water (just hot enough to drink)

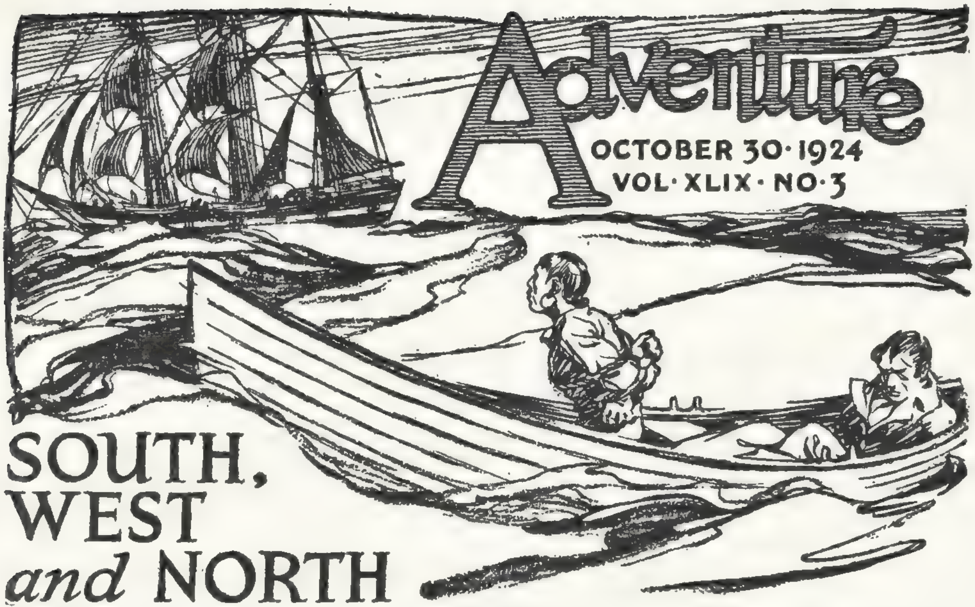
—before breakfast and at bedtime. Fleischmann's Yeast, when taken this way, is especially effective in overcoming or preventing constipation.

Or eat 2 or 3 cakes a day—spread on bread or crackers—dissolved in fruit juices or milk—or eat it plain.

Fleischmann's Yeast comes only in the tinfoil package—it cannot be purchased in tablet form.

All grocers have it. Start eating it today! You can order several cakes at a time, for yeast will keep fresh in a cool, dry place for two or three days.

Write us for further information or let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Address: Health Research Dept. Z-9, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York City.



Adventure
OCTOBER 30·1924
VOL·XLIX·NO·3

SOUTH, WEST and NORTH

A Complete Novel by H·BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "The Star Goes North," "The Star of Dreams," etc.

BOUND SOUTH

I

RICHARD HAMPTON, until an hour ago first mate of the brig *Acadian*, stared across Boston Harbor, and under his fingers the broad gold pieces in his pocket gave off a dull clink. He was aware of a man coming down the wharf, but he did not look around until the stranger addressed him affably:

"A brisk day, sir, a brisk January day! You are a seaman, I take it?"

Hampton turned and coolly surveyed the speaker. A swift flash of interest glimmered in his gray eyes; he had not thought to see such a man in all Boston, and particularly on Lewis' Wharf, this cold afternoon of January twenty-third. It was not the affluent external aspect of the man that interested him; he passed over the silk hat and rich broadcloth, the velvet collar, the heavy gold fob, the handsome ebony stick. It was the face of the man that held his gaze—a bronzed and high-boned face, full of weather-wrinkles like his own, whose dark eyes gave him look for look and in their arrogance held a peculiar glassy appearance. The face was assertive, self-confident, insolent in its expression of superiority and its air of experience. These two men were much alike, not in any facial resemblance but in a certain mutual self-reliance, a cool aloofness from all around. Each was stamped as a man of positive, downright action, able to take care of himself under any conditions.

"Why take me for a seaman, sir?" demanded Hampton, with no softening of his bleak gaze.

"Because of your interest in the *Capitol* yonder," and the other swung his stick toward the ship moored at the wharf, just beyond them. "You regard her with a seaman's eye. And you have rubbed off the corners in a way that sets you apart from these poor greenhorns. An officer, beyond doubt. My name, sir, is James Day."

"Mine is Richard Hampton, and you are right. I am a ship's mate, and would have had command next voyage had not the *Acadian*, across the harbor, been sold to a California company."

The two shook hands. Hampton encountered a strong, energetic grip, and a

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much hornier palm than to be looked for in so well-dressed a man. Day chuckled, and pointed again at the ship close by, and now ready to cast off.

"From your air, you seem to know her, sir."

"Aye, and heaven help the poor fools!" said Hampton, with cynical eye. "Her skipper is a hard one; old Proctor is the worst manhandler afloat, and a stubborn, opinionated man to boot."

A burst of yells and quick voices aboard the ship interrupted them, and suddenly her decks were alive with men. All were staring up toward the town, such as were not at work; Hampton and his companion likewise turned, as to them drifted the lively strains of a fife-and-drum corps, and gazed up the street.

"Gold and Bibles!" said Hampton, with a curt laugh. "It's a little gold the poor fools will ever see! They've been up at the Tabernacle Church listening to a sermon. They might better have been down at the docks listening to the truth about what's ahead of 'em."

Day gave him a shrewd, sidelong glance, but kept silence. This was the gold year, the year of '49, and few men in all New England would have agreed with the voiced sentiments of Richard Hampton. Certainly those sentiments were shared by none of the approaching mob, whose shrill clamor of voices was sweeping down to the wharf and echoing out across the water. The *Capitol* was the finest ship yet to leave for California, and the Naumkeag Company of Salem, now embarking, was the largest and best-equipped organization that had so far left Boston for the gold-diggings.

"There goes 'Susannah!'" and Day chuckled. "By the time they've rounded the Horn they'll be singing a different sort of tune, eh?"

A roar of voices swelled out, after the fife and drums, in one of the countless variations of the great song which was sweeping the country from Maine to Mexico. The fifes skirled high, the drums rolled, as down to the wharf came the head of the procession—the Naumkeag Company, two hundred-odd strong, armed to the teeth with rifles, pistols, bowies, each man carrying a large Bible, gay banners flying in the cold wind. Behind and around trooped a great mob of friends and relatives, curious townsfolk, envious neighbors. Salem men and Boston crowd all joined in the roaring chorus that went lifting across the bay:

"I came from Salem City
  With my shovel on my knee,
I'm bound for California
  The nuggets for to see!
'Twas bitter cold the day I left,
  Ahead 'tis warm and dry,
And gold-dust for the picking-up—
  Oh, brothers, don't you cry!

"Oh, California,
  That's the land for me!
I'm bound for Sacramento
  With my shovel on my knee!"

Out on the wharf poured the wild throng, women weeping, boys yelling, men shouting wild farewells and wilder prophecies of a wealthy return. Salem folk poured down to see the company off, just as folk were pouring down to many another New England wharf to see such companies depart—just as, in those first frantic golden days, other companies were being seen off from many a wharf in France and England and Germany, and even in distant Australia.

Richard Hampton and his companion drew well over to one side, out of the rush of folk. All the Salem men knew Dick Hampton, however, and he was promptly recognized. As the company trooped past, a storm of excited shouts and greetings was hurled at him, eager flashing faces were turned to him, for he had been three months away from home this voyage.

"Join up, Dick, join up! Good ship, good seaman—come along!"

"There's Dick Hampton, home from sea! See you in Sacramento, lad!"

"Gold ahead of us, Dick—pitch in and get your share before it's all picked up! Eli's gone to the diggings, Dick! We're out to beat the Salem Mechanics' Company—cap'n's promised to pass 'em this side Callao——"

Hampton waved his hand as the company stamped past, and his cool exterior showed no sign of the sudden heart-leap within him at Eli's name. Eli gone! What did that mean? Then, as he listened to the excited cries, the wild promises of gold, the farewells, he drew out a hand from his pocket and began to juggle a number of broad pieces.

"Gold!" he muttered. "Better look at it now, for it's all the gold you'll see!"

"Right," acclaimed a voice at his side. Half-startled, he turned to meet the dark and glassy eyes of James Day. "You're no fool—saw that at once, Mr. Hampton. Know the game, eh?"

"I know the sea," said Hampton, "and I know what these poor —— are up against at the end of the voyage. Yes, I know the game."

"Right. Come along, if you're free. I want a quiet word with you."

Day took his arm, and they worked along the edge of the wharf, out of the tide of crowding humanity. The business of the harbor was in full blast, for on every side other ships were fitting out in mad haste—the brig *Almena* was sailing in a day or two with the Bay State Mining and Trading Company, and others were getting ready in a frenzy to reach California before all the gold was gone. Reaching the head of the wharf, beyond the throng, Day halted and gave Hampton a friendly smile.

"These New England farmers and whalers and army men don't know the game, but you do; show that in your phiz, you do! At the same time, go slow in your notions, sir. I'm vice-president of the Beverly Panama Gold Company. You know how much better the Panama route could be, if there was any one along to show the way and to pull ropes. I know all those countries down there. We've organized a company, keeping our plans dark; we've got a brig chartered for Chagres and have arranged for passage from Panama to 'Frisco. It's no poor man's party, either. Shares cost five hundred, the Panama passage north is extra. You're a good man, and I'd like to have you with us. I'll offer you fourth mate's berth to Chagres, your wages to be remitted as passage money, and the company will pay your way over the Isthmus. We want one or two men who know how to handle themselves and others. Think it over, sir."

With this rapid speech, Day produced a cheroot, strode a few paces away, and began to watch the departing ship.

Hampton jingled the gold in his pocket, then thoughtfully got out his pipe and lighted it. He was quite aware of the high compliment that had been paid him, and found it puzzling. Any company could open its books, and have every berth, every bit of stock, subscribed in a day's time. There was no trouble about men wanting to go—the difficulty lay in getting passage. If, as men did, a man were to lay the keel of a schooner or brig on the ocean-side of his farm land, he could have an entire company formed and paid up before the ship's timbers were in place. Military companies were forming and drilling—companies of wealthy men, of mechanics, of college men, were all in a mad rush of preparation, competing for ships. The fever had gripped deep and promised to drain New England of its best blood. If Day had really secured a brig for Chagres, his company was in luck.

But—why this offer? Hampton was forced to take the explanation at face value. He knew that few of these companies, except possibly one or two from Nantucket way composed exclusively of whaling skippers, contained men who were leaders or who knew what they would face in California; while the Panama route was a chronicle of horror for all who had taken it, although as yet none of those at home would believe the fact. Men like Dick Hampton or this Day, older or steadier men who had keen ability and the strength of character to meet peril by sea or land, were not easily picked out. Greenhorns were many, experienced hands were few. Thus reflecting, Hampton walked up beside Day, who turned to meet him.

"I haven't the California fever, Mr. Day——"

"Precisely why I want you, sir."

"Well, what about you?" demanded Hampton. "You're not a New Englander. You're not a Beverly man, or I'd know of you. I'd like to know with whom I'm working."

"Right," Day nodded quiet acceptance of the demand. "I'll tell you frankly, Hampton, that I'm in this game to make money. A chap in Panama put me on to it, and I came up from Mexico for that purpose. Companies are pouring across the isthmus—and what happens? Even if they get across the isthmus, which most of them don't, they reach Panama and stick there. They can't get passage north to 'Frisco for love or money. The coasters are filled up with South Americans bound for the diggings, and the other ships can't hold a tenth of the greenhorns; even when passage is arranged in advance, the contracts are broken."

"True enough," said Hampton. "I've heard all about it."

"Right. Here's the lay, now! I've got two schooners at work, carrying passengers north from Panama. I come up here, organize a company, guarantee 'em first-class passage through, and no delay; and keep my word. Why, some of those poor —— have been in Panama for months, and die like flies from fever and plague! My company has none o' that. They get across the isthmus in my care, step into one or both o' my schooners, and off they go—slick! Also, they pay for the privilege, and pay high. They ought to. They'll be picking up nuggets in Sacramento before these folks here today will round the Horn! They're willing to pay extra, and I want only those who can afford to pay well for value received. I make money, and it's fair and square."

Hampton nodded. "Fair and square, sir. Well, I'm free of the gold fever, and I'm called home to Salem on an errand I can't postpone. At the same time, I'd like to think over your offer, if I may."

"Right. What's your experience?"

"I'm just home from first mate aboard the brig *Acadian*—she's across the harbor now, bought and fitting for 'Frisco with the Hampshire & Holyoke Company. I've not been around the Horn, but I've been everywhere else; across the isthmus and up the west coast, too."

"You'll do," said James Day decisively. "I'll keep open the berth for three days—until an hour of sailing time. By the way, we have a family going from your town—Jedediah Barnes and his daughter. Do you know them?"

Hampton slowly turned and looked at the speaker. He was an inch shorter than Day, yet tall enough, and wider through the shoulders. His face was thin and almost too harshly curved; one guessed that he could be a hard master, and so he was, though seamen liked him since he knew his business thoroughly. What spoke most from him was the poise of his head, the quiet tensity of his eyes, the deep firmness of his facial lines. Now, as he looked at Day, his gray eyes were level and hard, showing no emotion, but for an instant his teeth clenched on his pipe-stem. His chief business at home had been with Nelly Barnes.

"Jed Barnes? Yes, I know him. But he has—why, it's impossible! Nelly can't be going."

"She is, though." Day chuckled. His eyes were on the crowd, not on the man beside him. "Both going out. They're the only Salem folks with us."

"Why? Barnes has plenty of money."

"Like every one else, he wants more. He's sold out everything and is going to California to stay. Nice girl, Nelly! We've several married women in the company, and she'll be taken care of, you can be sure."

Hampton did not answer. He dimly realized that speeches were being made down the wharf as the lines of the *Capitol* were cast off, but the voice of Day rung in his brain. Nelly Barnes going to California! It seemed preposterous. He had not been home for three months, and much might have occurred in that time—his own brother, apparently, had gone. Yet Nelly Barnes, of all people!

"Three days, eh?" he said slowly. "Thanks, Mr. Day. I'll let you know."

"Right." Day nodded. "And keep your mouth shut, sir. It's known that we're going, of course, but we want no talking about our plans and so forth. We've made up our company quietly, picked the best men we could find, and are getting off for work, without any flourish of trumpets. Banners and Bibles are barred. So are pistols."

Day chuckled, but Hampton did not respond. With a curt farewell he turned and strode away. He had some accounts to settle, had to arrange about his chest and belongings; he could not get off for home before the early morning.

As he reached the head of the wharf, a sudden whirl of fifes and a lifting roar of voices from the crowd behind him burst into song. Hampton found himself keeping pace to the air, and then cursed it with sudden bitterness as the words impacted upon his brain.

Oh, California,
  That's the land for me!
I'm off for Sacramento
  With my shovel on my knee!

II

DICK HAMPTON, swinging along the frozen snowy road, came to the crossing of the little-used hill road from Lynn, and paused. He was four miles from home. One way lay South Salem and Marblehead, while on ahead lay Salem and Beverly. At this last fork, Hampton stood still and gazed a long while, and at last decided heavily that he must turn to the left for his father's farm and Peabody; and there was no joy in him at the decision.

So he turned—then he paused and stood motionless again, with dark premonitions stirring bitterly in his heart as he stared. For, coming from South Salem way, a loaded wagon was hard upon him, with two figures perched atop of the barrels and boxes; and Hampton recognized those figures at once. One of them had been heavily in his mind, the other joyously, this long while, and he did not know whether to bless or curse the fortune of this meeting. He knew the fine Havana shawl which was about the shoulders of Nelly Barnes as the gift he had brought her, his last voyage from the south. And, seeing that these twain were on their way to Beverly, he knew that James Day had spoken truth.

Jed Barnes was a hard, ruthless, utterly honest attorney who had never prospered at his profession. Fortunately he had farms outside Salem which paid him good money. Between him and Dick Hampton was no lost love. Barnes regarded all seamen as roaring runagates certain of eternal damnation, and Hampton in particular as a bucko mate, a killer of men; for this jaundiced regard there was a reason, though it lay not in Hampton's keeping. Years ago Jed Barnes had lost his only son at sea, murdered by the brutality of one yet unknown to fame—one "Bully" Martin who was to be infamous enough in later years. This loss made Jed Barnes curse all seamen impartially.

"Back, are ye? Back again, eh?"

Barnes had perceived Hampton, and pulled up his team as the wagon reached the crossroads. His stooped figure, his thin and lined features, loomed up above his daughter. Nelly gave Hampton a smile that was half-frightened, tremulous, wholly sad. Something terrible and unuttered lay in that smile, comprehending both greeting and farewell.

"Aye, back," said Hampton. "I stopped in Boston to see some of those poor —— starting for California. Well, Nelly, how are you? Where bound?"

Before the girl could reply, her father broke in sharply.

"What d'ye mean by that?" he demanded nasally. "Poor ——, huh?"

"Just that," said Hampton, meeting his bleak gaze. "Oh, it's pitiful enough! They're going out to face conditions they know nothing about——"

"How d'ye know so much about them, huh?"

"I've heard direct. They all dream of gold, and it's little they'll ever see. And if I knew any one going by the Panama route, I'd beg them on my knees to stay home."

"Why?" snapped old Jed angrily.

Hampton hesitated. Well he knew that his words were all hopeless, yet the sight of Nelly's eyes drew an ache into his heart. He had to say what he could to stop this folly, even though it were futile.

"Why? Because of lies told 'em, and what they don't know. The rotten food, the awful trip over the isthmus, the robbery and extortion, the impossibility of getting beyond Panama even if they get that far—they don't know these things! The fever that runs like fire through second-growth, the scores and hundreds living in tents, camped about the blue bay, waiting for ships that don't come—or, if they come, are full already——"

"Yah!" Jed Barnes drawled out the word nasally, scornfully. "Well, we're goin', and we got no time to waste yammering neither. Ye'd better git on home, Dick. Eli's gone, and I hear a letter has come from him. Might int'rest ye some. Gid'ap, there—gid'ap!"

He shook the lines, and the horses heaved at the traces.

"Goodby, Nelly," said Hampton, and the words stuck in his throat. For a long moment he met the eyes of the girl as he looked up at her—met her brave, clear, fine-hearted eyes which were fastened upon him so wistfully and longingly, sending him a tacit message which made the heart leap in him for sheer astounded wonder.

"Goodby, Dick," she said simply, and her voice drooped.

Then the horses were dragging the load forward, and the wagon creaked on. Dick Hampton stood gazing after it, but Nelly did not turn again.

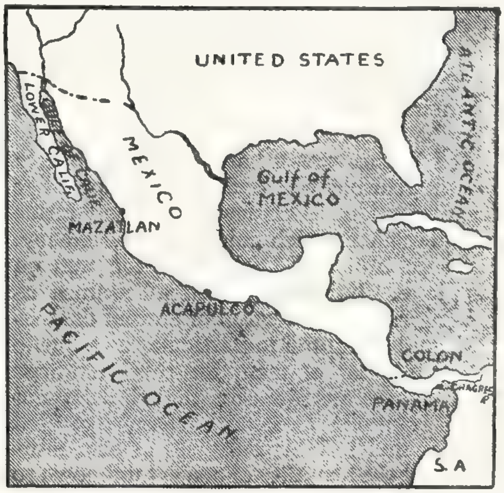
His hammering pulses ached. A younger man would have leaped after that wagon, would have uttered madly impulsive things; but Hampton stood silent, chilling his inner eagerness, cruelly master of himself and his emotions. After all, there was nothing between them! He read love in her eyes now, this minute, as he had wakened to love in his own heart, but it had not been uttered.

Presently he turned and trudged along toward home; not that he wanted to go there in the least. His will drove him onward, while his emotions flayed him without mercy. The adventurer and lover in him was crying out for Beverly, thirsting for that brig bound south to Chagres, and now more than ever in this terrible moment when he knew definitely that Nelly Barnes would be aboard her. Hampton knew only too well to what a hell the Beverly Panama Gold Company was departing, and in James Day he had singularly little faith—for some very obscure reason. It meant nothing to Hampton that the stooped man on the wagon hated him; he felt curiously above Jed Barnes. It was of Nelly that he thought. He might be of service on that voyage, he would surely be of service on the journey across the isthmus and beyond!

Nonetheless, there burned in his brain the words of Jed Barnes, forcing him to his duty. He must get news of Eli—that was imperative. A certain duty had come up. It drove him on, and would not be denied. Twice he had heard of Eli, and his heart was heavy. Nor had he missed the acerbity in Jed Barnes' tone at mention of that letter. And what now awaited him, with Eli gone, at the place he called home? His mother dead, his father a hard, bitter hard man, stern and cold as granite, narrow of vision and biting of tongue. Only too well did Dick Hampton feel that his own destiny lay well away; conflict with the cruel green meadows of the sea was sweeter to him than conflict with the implacable stony meadows of this land. He looked around at the snow-clad fields, the bleak stone fences, and cursed—yet he went on and on. Beverly must wait. Nelly must wait. First of all came duty, hard though it might be.

As he strode on along the road, a sudden laugh twisted his lips mirthlessly. What would Jed Barnes say, did he know of the invitation from James Day? Enough and to spare, no doubt. Barnes was like all the other greenhorns, taking a wagon filled with flour-barrels and other truck to ship to Eldorado. Flour! Why, there was a street in 'Frisco town paved with that useless stuff—spoiled and laid to fill the sand. Hampton had met a man in Havana, just back from Chagres and the other side, who had cursed the golden land most horribly, telling bare tales of its realities. Here, however, no man would believe these things, at least until another year or two; until letters came back and the broken tide of men began to straggle home once more to the New England hills—broken seamen and gentlemen, farmers and merchants, lure of gold gone glimmering from their hearts.

As he strode along, thus thinking, Hampton came suddenly to a halt; he stood listening, head cocked to one side, nostrils sniffing the cold air. No house was near at hand, yet he caught the sweet odor of wood-smoke, and with it the scent of meat at broil. Then he made out a thin thread of gray smoke, ascending from the heart of a bare and leafless thicket which stood close to the road; and, next moment, the voice of a singing man came from that same thicket, causing Hampton's eyes to widen in astounded recognition. It was a song that he knew, and a song he had heard many a time under grayer and sunnier skies, in long watches of the night or when men were clawing aloft and fighting the wind to reef the struggling canvas. He had never heard it except on the lips of one man—and now it came cheerily, like a ghost-song to numb his astonished senses:



"A little black bull came down from the mountain,
  Ri tura lingtum, ri tura lay!
A little black bull came down from the mountain,
  Ri tura lingtum, diddle diddle aye!"

Hampton wakened to life and action. He went crashing forward through the thicket, until he came upon an opening and stood there staring. Over the tiny fire was set a plucked fowl on a spit, and above the fire, gaping amazed at the intruder, was Job Warlock. Broad and squat and dark was Job Warlock, a man with Ojibway Indian blood in his veins, a man who had sailed the seven seas and bore the marks of them all; his face flat and heavy, his light blue eyes all alive and glowing like jewels, his reefer jacket and trousers of fine cloth, with flat gold hoops dangling from his ear-lobes.

"You!" cried Hampton.

"You!" echoed Job Warlock in equal astonishment, then leaped forward, yelled joyously, and struck hands.

Dick Hampton was taken back by this meeting, back across a year's time to that terrible winter's voyage from Bristol to Rio—an ice-sheeted ship, hammering through gales on gales with storm jib and to'gallant close-reefed barely keeping her out from under the roaring seas, and green water rolling waist-high across the decks. There men suffered or died, worked, sang, kept the ship going, saved each other, laughed or whimpered. Those tremendous arms of Job Warlock had saved Dick Hampton more than once, and more than once had Hampton's wide shoulders and lightning agility repaid the debt. Somehow the two men had grown close in those days, talking often of home and what lay behind them; the powerful half-Indian from Michigan forests, the keenly efficient New Englander from his rocky hillsides, found between them singular bonds of liking and friendship. Bosun and mate, they were both far above the forecastle level, holding glimpses of higher things than grog and women; they comprehended each other's barely hinted dreams and found strange, queer tales in the stars by night.

"You, by the crooked tree!" exclaimed Job Warlock, though only a Michigan 'Jibway could have told what that expression meant. "You, Dick!"

"You here, of all places!" cried Hampton, astounded. "What does it mean, Job? I thought you'd gone into the Melbourne packets——"

Warlock grinned widely. He had a wide, toothful grin, not reserved for mirth alone.

"Sit ye down, Dick—the world's a good place, so hurray! Bird's done and I'm hungry. Why, it means that I came to get news of ye, what else? I've waited for the day I could come to the home ye told me of, lad, and ask word of ye."

"But—here in this thicket?" Hampton sat down on some spread evergreens, and glanced around. "Why in these trees, Job Warlock? The farm's not far away——"

"Not far is far enough, as the Injun said when he rubbed his belly." Warlock, stooping over the fire, looked up and chuckled. "Your daddy, bless his soul, wanted no heathen foreign man wi' hoops in ears to be hanging about his door, and said so. Bless him, what a tongue! Well, I went away and sneaked back again, stole one of his hens, and here I be. And luck brought ye to me, lad—the world's a good place, so hurray! All's well and lights burning."

Dick Hampton compressed his lips. Yes, he might have known what reception his father would give this man—a dour and bitter one! Astonishment at their meeting died out, giving place to harsh anger. He could imagine what long travail it had cost Job Warlock to reach this spot on friendship's errand—only to get a sanctimonious curse and a godly reprimand!

But now Warlock took the fowl from the fire, slipped out his knife and placed half the bird in Hampton's lap.

"Injun does it!" said he cheerfully. "Have a bite of your own meat, lad! Injun does it, and a bit o' salt might help, but here's rum to wash it down. Come now, come now, ain't the world a good place? Hurray!"

From beside the fire he took a half-filled bottle of warm rum. Hampton bit into the meat, warmed himself with liquor, began to enjoy life. Here was a friend, here was a man never at a loss in any emergency—Injun blood indeed, true blood, true man!

Job Warlock ate ravenously, tearing at the meat, gulping it, washing it down with swigs of rum, until his share was gone and Hampton not half-finished. Then he leaned back and stuffed a pipe.

"Little black bull came down from the mountain,"

chanted he, and grinned. "Ho, lad! Jumped ship at New York—came over in her to get here, and a wonder ship she was, with Bully Forbes drivin' her! One o' them new Bluenose ships, and a holy ——, I can tell you. Bless me, how we did go! Never seen such a ship before. All stays and backstays of eleven-inch Russian hemp, tawps'ls roped from clew to earing, Bluenose ship and Glascow gear—and lokee, lad! Dry as a bone, yet running fifteen knots on a bowline with yards braced sharp! Ye hear that! And sail—bless me, but ye should ha' seen Bully Forbes crack on! Going into the Melbourne trade, he is, next v'yage. Running west'ard, we'd sight 'em with double-reefed tawps'ls, and we'd be doin' our fourteen close-hauled, wi' three royals and main-skysail booming! I came to bring ye the news o' them new ships, lad. You and me, we'll work back to England and ship wi' the Blackwall frigates, eh?"

Hampton lighted his pipe, smiling at Warlock's wild enthusiasm over these new ships and even sharing it in a measure.

"What about California?" he asked.

"Hey?" The other gaped at him for a moment, open-mouthed, then made a grimace. "Arrh! D'ye mean to say ye've bit that bait? Should h' known better, Dick Hampton! I was there three year back—d'ye mind me telling you about it? Aye, gold there may be, but it's a bleak, drear land, and heaven help the poor rogues ashore there!"

Hampton shook his head. "No gold bait on the hook, matey. All ye say is true, and more; by what I hear, there's many a man there wishing himself back home again. Ye remember I told ye of my younger brother, Eli?"

"Eli, eh?" Warlock nodded, his queer light-gray eyes glittering. "I seen nothing of him about the farm, Dick."

"He's gone to California, I hear, and word has come back from him. I'm going home to see what's to be done. Somehow, there's a feeling on me that I must go there, and 't's pulling cursed hard at me. Not that I want to go, mind! If I had my own way about it, I'd go on past the farm with never a word, on past Salem, and over to Beverly. There's a brig waiting, bound for Chagres."

Warlock groaned. "Chagres and hell is the same place—but ye know that, matey. I'spose you've been offered command of her, eh? What's the likes of you doin' as cap'n aboard a dirty little Chagres brig, when ye might be walkin' the deck of a fine packet wi' skysails and studdin's'ls blowing her over, a hundred days to Melbourne? Arrh! I'd sooner be a Blackwall packet-rat than skipper o' the best Chagres brig afloat! And so you would, too."

"I'm not offered any command—it's fourth mate's berth." Hampton pulled at his pipe. "There's more things in life than fine ships, Job."

"Hm!" Job Warlock studied him reflectively, then his swart features puckered up in shrewd surmise. "Ye've gone the way of all men, then; that's clear. There's a girl in it somewhere. —— the women! Aye, there's a lass in it. Ye've too much sense to ship for Chagres, otherwise, for ye know that hell-hole well enough. Still, the west coast's not so bad. I was drogin' hides up there in the Californias, as I've told ye before, under the San Juan cliffs and beyond, and I know it. Down below there it's a queer land, that west coast—Baja California they call it—all desert and Injuns and lost old missions and the bones o' white men. So it's a woman, eh? Well, the world's a good place——"

Hampton puffed at his pipe, sat silent for a little space, tempted sorely. A mile or so distant was the place he called home, with a jeer in his heart at the word. He had no affection for it, or for the man who lived there; none received, none given. If he went on, he anticipated biting words, harsh words, a flame of anger rising in him against the dour and godly man who lived by the letter of the Scriptures and knew not the spirit which lay behind them.

Of his own will, Hampton would have avoided all this. He would have gone on to Beverly, where he knew that, welcome or not, certain work awaited him. Yet duty impelled him home. He had money, and his father might have need of it; then Eli was gone, and this hurt him sorely. He must find out about it all. If he did so, he might never get to Beverly—this same duty to his younger brother might well turn his steps into a far different path. The thought brought sore hurt into his soul, yet he could not deny what must be done.

"Woman? More than that," he responded at length. "You were on the west coast three years ago, eh? Did ye ever hear of a man named James Day out that way, Job?"

"Day?" Warlock bit at his pipe-stem, shaggy brows down-drawn, and finally his ear-hoops shook in slow negation. "No. And yet, somehow, I mind the name ——"

"He has two schooners running north from Panama, or says that he has."

"Bless me, here we are—aye, there it is!

The world's a good place, so hurray! Day's the name—a privateer out o' the Argentine, they said, but more like a pirate, and had a fast schooner, heavy-armed. He looted here and there along the southern coasts. I heard talk of him, but that was back during the war. It was him helped our troops conquer Baja California, and the —— politicians gave it back to Mexico afterward. Aye, some said a scoundrel, some said a proper seaman and a good chap. I mind the talk now. Long time ago, as the Injun said when he rubbed his belly."

Hampton frowned. This might be the same man, and certainly fitted the personality of his recent acquaintance. It was no disgrace; in those waters odd things were done, and if Day were now in honest business, so much the better. Perhaps the man could keep his promises to the Beverly Panama Gold Company—it was a good way to make money, since he could charge high and give good value.

Hampton rose.

"Let's go home. Then I'll know what I have to do——"

"Nay, nay!" Job Warlock came to his feet. "I see breakers ahead for ye wi' that man, and I'll not stand by and hear the row. No pleasure in it. Set a meeting place and I'll be there, when and where ye will."

Hampton nodded.

"Beverly is a town north o' Salem. You can find Foster & Levett's wharf easy enough. Meet me on that wharf tomorrow night—say, eight o'clock."

"Right, matey."

"You have money?"

"Plenty. The world's a good place, so hurray! See you later."

Hampton turned toward the road. Even if his worst fears were true, even if duty led him by the hard path, even if one had gone out of his life for ever—here another had come back into it with warmth of friendship. He was not minded to lose Job Warlock, as he had probably lost Nelly Barnes.

III

EPHRAIM HAMPTON was chopping up old poles between house and barn, when he saw his son coming in from the road. He went on chopping, methodically, that big splay-bladed ax of his driving down into the white wood, snapping and crashing, splitting with fearful force into chunks set on end, shivering the poles, white chips flying all about in the trampled snow.

A terrible man, this, not for his great stooped body, but for the stark thing which was frozen in his gaunt face—the cold, chilled life which looked out of his eyes. No human affection lay there to see. All was naked granite, like the bleak hills rising dark upon the snowy horizon. When the time was come, this man drove his blade into the chopping-block, turned away toward the house, and before the doorway met his son. He gave no word of greeting, and ignored the half-questioning, half-wistful look of the younger man.

"Come inside," said he, and led the way into the cold house.

That was enough for Dick Hampton, who followed and looked with narrowed eyes of hatred at the clean and chilly parlor, at the fearful mockery of the mottoes and pictures on the wall, at the big Bible resting on the center table. If only a picture of his mother had hung here, all might have been different, but there was none.

"Sit you down," said his father, stiffly lowering himself into a chair at the table.

The cold voice and the colder heart behind it drove an icy knife through Hampton's spirit. He was afraid of this man, he had always been afraid of him as his mother had been afraid. Not at all a physical fear; only a desperate and frantic shrinking of the warm soul from this abnormal thing in the guise of a man.

In sudden panic, Hampton longed to be out of here and away. Home! The word was mockery. He had found a better home than this in the squeaky forecastle of ships, with rats astir in the dark, with brine working in past strained bowsprit and leaking over the peak bunks, with the reek of sweat and steaming clothes closed in a week on end; more home, more human affection, in that place with its wild oaths and lewd talk than in this horrible abode of cleanliness and sanctity. No wonder Job Warlock refused to return here! Stout old Job had foreseen hell in prospect for the friend he loved. No wonder poor Eli had fled from this to the lure of golden California, as Dick himself had fled from it years before.

Hampton looked at his father, met those icy eyes, a colder gray than his own, and wondered. No pity lay in him for this man deserted in old age by both sons, for the man needed none. No emotions appeared to lie within that heart of granite—only stern duty. Ephraim Hampton was fiercely sufficient unto himself; he had grimly fought off the world until now it lay clear outside him, ignored, and he hewed only to the line of cold duty as he saw it. Dick stiffened a little, began to throw off his awe and fear, in a bitter rush of remembrances and memories; the man was no longer the child. Five words thus far, and not a word of greeting—while Job Warlock, who loved him, was tramping alone over the snow ruts toward Salem!

Still, the mere coming here had required an effort of will, and the effort must be maintained. Perhaps some spark of kindness might yet be struck from that flinty heart—perhaps it was the older man who was awaiting some sign of affection, of warmth. Dick put hand to pocket and drew out some of the loose gold there, and smiled.

"Well, father, I've not done so badly this trip. We turned a good trade at Havana, and I had a share in it, so here's a roll of the yellow boys that'll put new paint on the house and keep you in comfort——"

"I'll have none of your ill-got gold," said Ephraim Hampton coldly. "Put it away, for ye'll have need of it if ye do your duty, and more beside."

Dick reddened under his bronze, and anger leaped in his unrestrained.

"Ah, this is more like it!" he said, coolly unsheathing the one weapon which never failed to drive home and infuriate his father. "You've sent out to all the neighbors?"

"And why?" demanded the other, deceived by that casual tone.

"To bid them to the feast, o' course. I suppose you've killed the fatted calf, and have decided to get out a jorum of rum for dinner ——"

"Ye sacrilegious ruffian!" snapped his father, then checked the outburst and sat with big gnarled hands clenching and unclenching. The weapon had failed this time.

"Not a bit of it," said Dick lightly. "Sorry I didn't bring Micky with me. He's an Irish chap, came up from the Havana with us. He says that the Irish believe hell to be a cold place, not a hot one—he'd have been confirmed in the belief if he'd come home with me. Yes, this is a grand reception and I appreciate it. Let's have Eli's letter, eh? Trot it out, and then I'll be running along on my way."

The older man had a weapon, and a more terrible one, which he did not disdain to use.

"While you're in this house," he said in a cold voice, biting off his words, "ye'll not fail in the duty ye owe the man who begat ye, Richard. Aye, that's your mother's impudence in ye, showing up! A wild heart she had and ——"

This weapon did not fail. Dick Hampton flushed, then a livid pallor crept into his face, and his lips parted in a snarl.

"You lying dog," he said, leaning forward in his chair, "put your —— tongue to my mother again and I'll drive your teeth in! Duty to you? Bah! I've had enough o' you!"

Ephraim Hampton put out a hand to the great Bible lying before him, and the knotted fingers were trembling; but his granite face did not change expression. Only a subtle tone of his voice showed his gratification at having pierced his son's armor.

"There's a verse I have to read ye," he said. "It has to do with Eli's letter, and the duty that's upon ye."

There was a moment's silence. Dick Hampton drew a deep breath and relaxed, while his father donned spectacles and turned pages, mouth set in a harsh and unyielding line of thin red. Dick strove for calm, knowing that he had let himself be trapped into an outburst which he now regretted. Home! He cursed the place bitterly. If he had ever had a home to come back to, as other men had, a home to linger in and leave with loathing, a home to welcome him, all would have been different. Then he would have seen more of Nelly Barnes. Then he would not have stood at the crossroads today and been forced to see her going away, with only one look from her eyes to leave an ache in his heart and an emptiness in his very soul.

It did not occur to him that in all this there might be the writing of destiny's finger. He looked upon it as one mischance after another—his loss of a berth, due to the sale of the *Acadian* to a gold company; his meeting with James Day, and the bitter news that man so idly gave him; his meeting with Nelly at the cross-roads, and now this scene of hideous cruelty, this travesty upon a home-coming. He could not see the thin red thread of connection running through it all. As he thus sat waiting, a woodpecker began to tap somewhere about the roof; and in a flash he was out at sea again, the cold wind pouring down from an icy sky, and somewhere overhead the *tap—tap—tap* of frozen reef-points smacking the hard, full-bellied canvas. Although the vision was gone instantly, that slight recurrent sound had called up all the manhood in him, so that then and afterward he was full master of himself, with never another burst of the red fury. Indeed, this scene in the farmhouse put a final seal, a finishing touch, to his character which it badly needed, since the spiritual body can grow only through suffering of the spirit—a prime argument, this, against a solitary hell of fire and brimstone.

Ephraim Hampton looked up and spoke, finger heavy on the Bible page before him.

"Here we are. Listen, now, and ye needn't get out that smelly, vile pipe. Take heed! 'And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.' Let those words sink into your dark heart, Richard, while I find your brother's letter."

With this, the man began to search through the pages, in which he had evidently laid away that missive. Dick Hampton sat watching, pressing back an ironic smile at the twist of those words in his father's mind; here before him was one who could read only the letter of the law, denying in his whole life its spirit—and now preaching that same letter to the son for whom he bore no love.

"Aye, here 'tis!" Ephraim Hampton picked up a folded sheet of paper and began to uncrease it—a dirty, torn, stained sheet. "Read! See for yourself the mercies vouchsafed the runagate prodigal. Then hear what I have to say to ye."

Hampton leaned forward, took the paper, spread it out on his knee. Two words of that wretched scrawled writing met his eye, brought a thin smile to his lips. Even poor Eli, then, omitted any least word of affection in writing this man! Then he read on, and the smile vanished from his face, and storm gathered in his eyes.

MY FATHER:

If this reaches you, I charge you give it into the hands of Dick when he comes again. I have been through fever and suffering and horrible sights. A week ago I won ten thousand pesos in the lottery. Today I lie in the Panama jail in rags. Tomorrow I set forth upon my bondage, a two years' slavery somewhere up the west coast. Yet my lot is better than others. Some Vermont men have been here six months and exist only on charity. Two companies arrived from New York last month and are now three-fourths dead from plague and fever.

My fate is due to a man named Dias or Diaz, who sometimes uses the name of Winslow and tells his victims he belongs to a New York company. He is not a Mexican, but a renegade Englishman or American. A plausible scoundrel. He wheedled me out of my money, then had me flung in jail here until I would consent to go into two years of slavery. He robs men bound for California.

This man has given me to his wife as a slave; the señora aids him in his dastardly work. She is very beautiful, but a hundred times worse than he. This sounds incredible; it is the ghastly truth. Other poor men go with me, several Frenchmen. Outside my barred window is my only friend, a poor Indian named "El Hambre," who will send this letter. He hates Winslow or Dias. They would kill him if they knew, for no letters are allowed. Dick, my love to you if you get this, and goodby.

ELI HAMPTON.

The letter was not dated.

What struck swiftest to the heart of Dick Hampton was that his brother made no direct appeal. There was the situation—take it or leave. No help was expected. Probably the boy thought none could be given, deeming himself beyond help. And by this time, he very possibly was beyond help.

As to the renegade Winslow or Dias, the tiger preying on the gold-seekers, Hampton gave him little thought. The man was one of many. Those who started for California met with no pity or mercy; they were fair game for all human tigers, and were robbed, plundered and murdered right and left.

"Poor Eli is better off than most of them," said Hampton aloud. "As a rule, few manage to write home. A man in Havana told me that he had seen the Panama beach covered with corpses every morning—new bodies each day. And this was only a few weeks ago."

His father's stony silence and stonier eyes made no answer; and as he re-read the letter, his heart sank. What could he do, even if he should find this man Dias—kill him? That would not help Eli. Ransom the boy? No such luck. Men forced into slavery would not be let free at any price. The sending of this letter itself was a miracle. The name of that Indian—El Hambre, or "Hunger"—looked very singular. The whole thing left Dick Hampton feeling helpless. Then, as he thought back to what must have happened in the beginning, he lifted bitter eyes to his father.

"Your fault," he said, with intent to make his words bite. "You always loved Eli a little bit—and kept him here in your private hell. If you'd given him a chance, he'd have waited and asked me about going. I suppose you had words, drove him to it—eh? And you preach brotherly love! You ought to take that text of yours out West to the Sioux and Blackfeet, along with a keg of rum; they might understand it! So poor Eli is rotting somewhere in Mexico now—and all by your fault."

The hard words hurt, and Ephraim Hampton winced, and his high chin sagged a little. At this, Dick stared curiously; it was the first time he could remember seeing that man of granite betray any sign of emotion. Yes, there must have been some bitter storm when Eli fled forth. Perhaps the father had let his tongue slip on the dead woman—only this would explain the two cruel words opening that letter.

"Ready to listen to me?" asked Ephraim Hampton in a dead voice.

"Fire away," said the son, and leaned back. He got out his pipe and stuffed it. "If you don't like my smoking, be —— to you. I'm not in slavery, at least."

This brought another wince; but Dick, thinking of his mother who had died before her time, and of his brother, only laughed cruelly.

"It's this," said the older man. "Your duty is to go and look for Eli. It's your bounden duty, Richard; I say it. I, who begat you, lay that duty upon your conscience."

Dick laughed again, and now spoke words that he did not entirely mean, as men do when the white heat of anger is in their brain.

"Who are you to lay a duty upon me?" he said, meeting those icy eyes squarely with his own gaze, and speaking quite coolly. "Did I ever have a friendly word from you in my whole life? Not one. Many a dutiful word, but never one of affection or love. You hate all the world, including yourself, and always did. You're a narrow-minded old man, and I thank heaven daily that I've mighty little of your mean disposition in me. What I am, I owe to mother—and the same with Eli. You needn't lay any duty on me, because I don't give a hang for your laying; I see things with my own eyes, not with yours. If you'd given me one gentle word when I came in this house today, I'd have met it half-way—but it's not in you. You've made your bed and for all of me you can lie in it. What good could I do poor Eli? He's gone."

His words met with no anger, only with an intensified coldness. Ephraim regarded his son grimly for a moment, then made response.

"True enough, Richard, all very true; but let me finish. You are, and always have been, a headstrong and unregenerate limb of the devil. Love? No. You've given me hate for hate, and yet I cannot say that I hate you at all. You've given me grief and pain with your ungodly ways, and yet I never put you from my roof. If you were in Eli's place today, I'd do for you what I shall for him."

This gave Dick pause.

"Duty," he commented, and uttered a scornful laugh. Yet he began to see that while he and his father were poles apart, every question was bound to have two sides.

"Aye, duty," said the older man. "I think more of Eli than I do of you, yes. Why not? He stayed here with me while you ran away to sea, to wallow in the iniquities of godless men——"

"Aye," and Dick broke into a laugh, then began to chant the words:

"As I was a-walkin' up Paradise Street,
Way, hay, blow the man down!
A pretty young gal I chanced for to meet,
Give me a hand to blow the man ——"

"Silence!" snapped his father. "Will ye listen to me out or no?"

"If ye have anything better than sermons to deliver. As for going after Eli, why not go yourself? It was you sent him out, not I—and I can imagine the words on your godly lips that drove him to take flight."

Then Dick Hampton was astounded; for his father, sitting there so grimly, lifted a hand as if to ward off a blow.

"Don't. Don't! That's true enough."

He held the gnarled hand over his eyes for a moment, and then the thin lips were compressed. Then he relaxed, sat back, looked at his son. "I've sold the east forty, Richard, and the money's here in the desk. It's been waiting for you. Take it and go, find Eli, and tell him that—that I've repented the bitter words I said."

This came hard enough, and fairly smote Dick in the face. He could not believe his own senses. None the less, he kept up the game he was playing, for now he found it leading him into astonishing ways. He had meant first to torment and taunt the man, yet now he meant quite otherwise, for it seemed that he had at last found a means to pierce that cold armor.

"Not I," he said. "I've money of my own, and enough. Take your own money and go, if ye want, for I'll have none of it. Blood money, that's what it is! I'll not touch your thirty pieces of silver——"

Ephraim Hampton leaned forward, his great fingers twisting together.

"Richard, I'll not last long," he said quietly, earnestly. "I'm to die any day, they tell me. I want you to do this thing. Oh, my lad, is all your soul a hardened thing? Is there no love in you for your brother? Granted I've not been what I should—there's yet your own duty. I'll not last long, Richard. Will ye go and take my blessing, or will ye have my curse on you?"

"Little enough your curse would worry me, and that's flat," said Dick. Then, as he met his father's eyes, he checked himself. He felt himself staring into those eyes, felt all his world rocking to chaos around him—for in those bitter and intolerant eyes there was a glistening that he had never seen there, even when his mother died—the glisten of tears.

Dick put his thumb on his pipe-bowl, pressed down the gray ash, shoved the pipe into his pocket. Then he thrust himself erect. He made his decision swiftly, on the instant, as it must be made when the wind shifts about if the ship is not to be stripped bare.

"Your money," he said slowly, deliberately, "I don't want and sha'n't touch. Lay a duty on me? I'll cheat you even in that—aye, cheat you even in that! It's little you know of the man who's awaiting me at Beverly, or the girl who's there, or the friend I have on the road—little you know or would care if you knew. But never mind all that. Father, I'm going to Panama, going a dozen errands in one—and one of the dozen is Eli's. Tell me this. You love him?"

The stooped figure stood before him, staring at him mistily.

"Aye, Richard. And if ye'd not give me hate for hate—I don't know——"

Dick Marsh took a step forward and caught the other man by the shoulders. Then all that was repressed leaped into his face, and he looked at his father as he had looked at Nelly Barnes that morning, with things in his eyes too deep and great for words.

"Father," he said in a low voice, "I'm going, and I'm going now. I don't give a hang for your curse—but, father, I—I'd give you a kiss on the lips for your blessing——"

The woodpecker tapped along the eaves, like the *tap—tap—tap* of frozen reef-points slapping a bellying sail, but Dick Hampton did not hear the sound.

IV

SO BEVERLY was like other seaport towns up and down the Atlantic seaboard; like seaport towns in Europe, from Vigo Bay to North Cape; like towns in Australia and China, Peru and Russia, in this marvelous winter and spring of 1849. All seaports were alike, those days, busily pouring men down to ships, and speeding ships forth for Eldorado; not for another year or more would the sickening realities be brought back to them by those few who struggled home.

Here in Beverly as elsewhere, the ebb tide of ships and men was now well under way, shipyards ringing, vessels building in the bare woods, on the naked rocky shores, wherever men could swing adze and plane to cut softwood timbers. At night the harbor was still and cold, star-blink glittering over snowy streets, houses agleam with lights where men packed and made ready. Tales of gold were carried from hearth to hearth, gaining fresh accretions with every telling, and the cold winter's night was all athrill with subtle vibrations from an excited populace, raw red gold lending a warm glow that softened the frosty air and brought a flame across the horizon as men looked westward over the bleak hills and visualized California.

Dick Hampton had timed his coming well and carefully, since he had particular reason for not wanting to be recognized at the present moment. He did not want Jed Barnes to know of his presence until Baker's Island was left behind and the pilot dropped; otherwise, he could scent trouble brewing. If he could find where Day's brig lay and get aboard her, he would be safe enough. The lading would be a thick job at the last and the other mates would be glad men to let him stick below and handle stowage.

It was just eight of the night when he came striding down Cabot Street, past the white cottages and the shuttered shops where men sat reckoning their books by tallow dips and sperm lamps, past the warehouses and silent marts of trade, to the long reach of Foster & Lovett's wharf, black against the blacker water and the riding lights of ships. He saw that some ship hung there against the wharf, lined fast, a glow coming from her fo'csle hood and a glow from her cabin skylight, and aloft a yellow star that lacked the cold glitter of the white stars of heaven. Then he heard the hum of a voice, keeping time to the frosty crackle of his own steps on the cold boards:

"A little black bull came over the mountain,
Ri tura lingtum, ri tura lay!
Oh, a little black bull came over——"

"Bless me, it's you!" Job Warlock lounged forward from the shadows of a high freight pile. "And here's a swig o' rum to warm your bones, matey. The world's a good place, so hurray!"

Hampton took the proffered bottle gratefully, and a gulp of Jamaica drove the chill from him. Job Warlock chuckled.

"Well, what luck wi' the old man, lad? Ye still look alive and well."

Hampton expelled a long and frosty breath.

"It won't bear talking of, Job. What news?"

"None." Warlock grunted. "All the folk hereabouts are crazy for California. It's as much as your life's worth to tell 'em the truth o' that passage. News from your brother?"

"Ill news enough." Hampton got his pipe alight. "He's in trouble—robbed and bound over to practical slavery. A man down there named Winslow or Diaz makes a business of robbing greenhorns and binding them over to work for him as peons. No Glasgow packet for me, Job; our ways part here, I'm afraid. I'll have to take a berth in this Chagres brig, wherever she is, and see if I can find Eli."

"Huh! Then you'll go across the damned isthmus to die o' fever."

"That's as it may be. On to Acapulco if I can't get news of Winslow or Diaz at Panama. Ever hear of such a man down there? He has a Mexican wife."

"Diaz? That's like askin' for a man named Jones in a Welsh port. Diaz! Millions of 'em. But hold on—there it is, aye! I mind such a name in Acapulco. Chap called—no, it wasn't Diaz neither, but a name like it. Spanish chap showed me the difference; one has a lisp, the other hasn't. Aye, here's the name! Dias."

"That it. Eli said the name was Diaz or Dias." Hampton drew a quick breath. "Ha! What d'ye know of him? He was in Acapulco, ye say?"

"No—heard of him there." Warlock spoke thoughtfully. "What was it, now? Nothin' good—huh! Just a bit of it comes back. It was a wild story we heard, that's all. He had a place on the California coast, over near Loreto; pearl fisher, he was, who had looted some churches in Mexico. Nobody knew exactly; all sorts o' stories went around. Somebody wanted us to jump ship and go over there and shoot him up. That's all I remember. Just a story, it was."

"Story enough, by gad!" exclaimed Hampton. "Now I've got something to go on, at least."

"Hold up there! Me too, as the Injun said when he rubbed his belly."

"You? I thought you wouldn't go to Chagres?"

"Who said so? Not me. I'm with you to Chagres or ——, matey! Injun does it. Now, then, what's the name o' this blessed Chagres bark?"

"I'm glad, Job—you don't know how glad I am!" said Hampton, and his voice showed the quick leap of friendship in him. "Her name? I don't know. She's a chartered bark and sails in a day or two. Easy enough to find her——"

Job Warlock grinned, and pointed with his finger to the ship lying at the wharf, her spars outlining a slim dark tracery against the star-studded carpet of the sky.

"There she is, then. The *Hannah*. Off tomorrow afternoon, with luck."

The Salem man stared at the dark shape of the vessel, half-concealed behind the waiting piles of freight. He was thinking less of her than of his friend, however. He had not doubted that Job Warlock, despite protestations, would stick with him; yet it was a stern test of friendship, since Job knew well enough what awaited them in the south, and shrank from it. For the rest, one place was as good as another to the dark man, and no doubt the quest after the missing Eli fired his Indian blood.

"I've had my eye on her," went on Warlock, "and there's going to be doin's——"

"Go slow," said Hampton. "Talk Spanish."

They both saw a figure crossing from ship to wharf—a large, dark figure, with the red glow-point of a cigar burning and dying; one of the officers going up to town, no doubt. Warlock continued in Spanish, which he spoke with Mexican purity, for in Mexico has survived the old gracious Castilian that has been lost among the lisping dialects of Spain.

"Doin's aboard her, I can tell ye! Terrible long royal yards and stiff wi' new canvas; an old softwood ship and hell to pump, and Yankee mates. Whew! But that's not the worst. All these here," and Job swept his arm out to indicate the freight piles, "are stores goin' aboard, some for the voyage, some taken by the company. New York stores, and you know what that means."

"The gulf sharks will eat full, eh?" said Hampton. The tall dark figure was coming past them, cigar point glowing, booted heels crackling on the frosty planks.

"Aye." Warlock laughed harshly. "Old condemned army rations, old salvaged tinned stuff, full o' poison. Bless me, you'll hear the popping begin before we're off Hatteras! Still, she has good lines and a Yankee crew, and they'll drive her. I expect she'll see Chagres River in well under twenty days, barring bad luck."

"May the saints grant it, señor!" said a voice in Spanish.

The dark figure halted, and now came around a pile of boxes toward them. Hampton, instantly recognizing that voice, turned.

"That you, Mr. Day?"

"Aye. Who's this, then?"

"Hampton and a friend. You recall our meeting in Boston?"

"Oh! Hampton from Salem—well met, sir, well met! I wondered who on earth could be speaking Spanish here; not a man aboard knows a word of it."

Day put out his hand, a warmth of quick cordiality in voice and grip. Hampton wondered whether Day had caught the disparaging comments about the ship and stores, but did not ask.

"You've come to ship with us?" said Day.

"I'd like to talk it over. I've run into an old friend, Job Warlock, bosun out of the Blackwall Line and a sound seaman. What are the chances for him to ship, too, as far as the isthmus? He doesn't care for California, but we're old friends and would like to ship south together if possible."

Day laughed at that. "D'ye know we could ship ten men for every berth for'ard? But come aboard with me—I was only off for a stroll. Come aboard and have a drink and a smoke in warm comfort. So you both speak the Spanish, eh? That's good. We'll talk things over."

"Right," said Hampton. "Come along, Job."

The three walked up the wharf and came to the ship, going aboard by a gangway of planks laid to aid the freight stowage. Even in the starlight Hampton could note the prim neatness of her decks, lines coiled and flaked, everything shipshape; her officers knew their business. Aft at the companionway, Day chuckled.

"Good thing you came along—this is my last bit of comfort. Tomorrow we turn over most of these cabins to the ladies, and the officers will berth in the for'ard house abaft the foremast. Cap'n and passengers take the cabins. Well, here we are!"

They descended into the cabin, where a gimbal-slung lamp dispensed light and warmth, and made themselves comfortable. Day appraised Job Warlock with one keen glance, and nodded without hesitation.

"You'll do; we'll make room for you, bosun. Some of our thrifty company members are working to Chagres as crew, and we'll need a good helmsman. Well, Mr. Hampton, you've decided to come?"

"I think so," returned Hampton, puffing at his pipe and accepting the mug of grog that Day poured for him. "However, I don't understand what my position is to be—after Chagres. Do we go up the river by boat?"

"Aye, across by boat and trail to Panama."

Day stretched out his long legs and doffed his hat. Bare-headed, he showed thin of hair, his skull knobby and with the ears set high; so high, indeed, that they gave him a singularly wolfish appearance. Hampton had ere this met men with high ears, and had found little good in them, so that this troubled him.

"Here's the lay. I've made all arrangements for boats and mules; and, as I told ye, for a schooner at Panama. If I could be there in person to fulfil my obligations by taking the company across in person, all well and good; but I've business interests, and at Chagres may be called aside. Then what? You to take charge. Those rascally natives will need the strong hand of authority. This man Warlock can speak Spanish, so let him come along. Both of you on wages to Panama, and there, Mr. Hampton, take your choice! Go your way if you like, or I'll make you captain of one of my schooners."

"Hm! Then you're taking me along merely to run things in case you're called away?"

"Right—and because I like you."

"Fair enough. It's agreed." Hampton knocked out his pipe. "Now I'll tell you why I want to go. Did you ever happen to hear of a renegade Englishman or American down there, who uses the names of Winslow or Dias?"

The effect of this question was astounding. Day started, and his glassy eyes gripped on Hampton, while a queer pallor stole across his face; then, suddenly, there came a little *click!* and a cocked derringer showed in his hand.

"Explain those words!" he snapped harshly. "What do you know of that man?"

"I mean to find him," said Hampton, astonished. "He is a rascal——"

"He's my bitterest enemy on this earth," said Day, then drew a deep breath and relaxed. He thrust away his pistol, took out a fresh cigar, lighted it. "Your pardon, your pardon—the very mention of that man's name was a whiplash! He has injured me sorely. Why seek you him?"

"Then you know where I can find him?" demanded Hampton.

There was a momentary conflict of will, here in the cabin, while Job Warlock sat back and sucked his pipe, shaggy brows pulled down over steely eyes that looked from one man to the other. Day had asked a question, so had Hampton; for a moment it seemed that neither would yield to other in stubborn determination to be answered. In Day's powerful features those glassy eyes were glittering and flaming, betraying a savage exertion of the will, but Hampton met and answered the look with eyes cold as gray ice. He was, in fact, wondering why Day was so desperately intent upon being answered first, and a flashing, momentary warning was implanted in his mind by the glimmering dark gaze. Then Day shot up his brows and yielded.

"That is something no one knows," he answered slowly. "The man is no better than a pirate. It is said that he is established somewhere in Baja California, on the gulf called the Vermilion Sea or Sea of Cortez; still, nothing is very certain down there. I have old scores against him, but lack the strength to cope with him openly. If this expedition goes through successfully, I shall have money enough to work against him. Then I shall hire men and go after the rascal."

"Good," said Hampton. "I got home yesterday to find a letter from my brother Eli, who went to California and got no farther than Panama. This man Winslow, or Dias, bound him into slavery. You and I might pursue our mutual end together, if it pleases you."

Day started slightly.

"Oh!" said he. "So that's it, eh? Yes, Mr. Hampton, your proposal appeals to me. Hm! Well, we shall discuss the question later on. I am glad that you have decided to go with us. Our company numbers forty-three in all, and most of them come aboard in the morning, since we sail tomorrow afternoon. The officers and many of the crew are ashore, so I had better go and look up your quarters, if you'll excuse me."

Then Day rose and left the cabin.

For a little, Hampton and Job Warlock sat together in silence, until at last Warlock cleared his throat and then grunted.

"A penny for your thoughts, matey," he said in an odd voice.

Hampton looked up.

"Eh? I was thinking that Mr. Day will make money by this trip," he said reflectively. "He'll charge them a flat five hundred dollars a head to Panama, and will clear a tidy sum by that alone; while the passage to 'Frisco will be as much more, on his own ships."

"Hm!" Warlock grunted again. "Mighty queer that he'd need us, Dick. Aye, it has a queer look, and so has the man himself! He was mighty anxious to know why you wanted to find Dias. So the two are enemies, huh? Well, we'll see what we'll see. It's in my mind that our friend here will be a hard man in action, aye, a stiff 'un and no mistake!"

In a few minutes Day returned, calling Warlock, and motioned Hampton to remain. Job Warlock, who had left his duffle ashore, went to see his quarters and go after his things. Hampton sat over his pipe until Day returned to the cabin and carefully shut the door. He quite understood that the man wanted a private word with him, and looked up to meet the piercing gaze of those glassy eyes, and spoke first.

"One thing, Mr. Day! Arrange, if you can, that I take over the cargo stowage tomorrow. I'd like to keep out of sight until we're at sea; one of your company has no love for me."

"So? And who is that?" asked Day, his brows lifting.

"Jed Barnes."

Day's eyes narrowed for an instant, and then it was Hampton glimpsed for the second time a swift vision of dark things in the man. When Day laughed, it was gone quickly.

"Oh! The little lass, eh? Right, right; I'll see to it. Now, a word with you! What aim in life have ye, Hampton?"

"Eh?" Hampton was puzzled by the sharp, direct question. "How mean you?"

"Aim, end, objective!" Day waved his hand. "D'ye want to get on, make money?"

"Aye. All men do."

"I told ye I had interests down below. I know a number of men there—not good or godly men, mark you! If you and I go together and seek this man Winslow or Dias, if we combine against him, it's fight fire with fire. Are ye willing to join with these other friends o' mine, let me give you letters to them? There's little law down in Mexico, you understand. In a year you can make your fortune, gain your revenge, and all's clear."

Hampton, astonished as he was, did not miss the dark hint. He understood perfectly that Day was allied with filibusters, privateers, pirates, smugglers; that those were the other interests of which the man had spoken. Here was a chance being offered him—a chance which would not come easily a second time. He hardly hesitated in his reply.

"No, Mr. Day. With all thanks to you, I say no. I comprehend your meaning, I think, but I can't fall in with it. Not that I love the law, but I don't care to go about things in just that way."

Day regarded him steadily, his bronzed features quite expressionless; somehow, Hampton distinctly gained the impression that behind the man's words there had been many and deep things unuttered—that this proposal had been a feeler, as it were. There was no disgrace in being connected with privateers or filibusters or smugglers; to contravene the law, especially in Central American waters, was quite fashionable. Gringo and greaser were bitter enemies, both open and covert.

Hampton's refusal sprang, rather, from a growing distrust of James Day. Something in this man had begun to grate on him, though he could not account for the feeling. In that steady and inscrutable gaze he fancied that he could discern a singular impatience of control, a lack of all scruple, a stirring of dangerous things. Further, Job Warlock's swift judgment of the man lingered in his mind.

"You're quite sure?" asked Day slowly, and Hampton realized that in some sense the question was an ultimatum.

"Quite," he responded cheerfully.

Day again waved his hand, and showed his teeth in a quick smile.

"Right! Every man must choose his own road. For your own sake, I'm sorry. Now, if you'll come with me I'll show you our quarters. Have you a chest?"

"No, I brought nothing," and Hampton rose, with a feeling of relief. "I'll draw on the slop-chest for oilskins, or buy them."

"Right," approved Day, and they left the cabin together.

V

DESPITE threatening weather, every tide counted in the race for California and gold, so that with the last of the cargo stowed, the brig *Hannah* stood out on the afternoon ebb while the hatches were still being battened down.

Hampton, hard at work below, saw nothing of the ceremonial departure. The brig's crew was a miserable lot, since most of the good seamen had already gone to the golden land; they were a bad mixture of city boys, Liverpool packet rats, and farmers, with not four good men in the lot. As Hampton labored to get the last of the provisions stowed, he was dimly aware of cheers and speeches and songs from the wharf above, heard the familiar chorus of "Susannah" ringing out to improvised words, and came scrambling up to the deck to find the ship standing out, the canvas shaking out, and all hands aloft except his own gang at the hatches. Now the last of the cheers from poop and wharf gave place to the hoisting chanty that Job Warlock started, and on which the packet rats and others fell in with a will:

"Oh, fare you well, I wish you well,
Good-by, fare you well! Good-by, fare you well!
Fare you well, my pretty young gal,
Hurray, my boys, we're outward bound!

"Our anchor's weighed and our sails are set
Good-by, fare you well! Good-by, fare you well!
The girls are leaving, we leave with regret,
Hurray, my boys, we're outward bound!"

Hampton saw nothing of the Barneses, for he had to jump from the hatches to his station at the mainmast, relieving the chief mate of this job and giving his attention to the canvas. The afternoon was dark, with snow in the air and gray scud in the sky. All the Beverly Panama Gold Company were crowded aft, still waving last farewells to the despair of the second officer, who tried in vain to make himself heard at his station above the din. At length Hampton started the haul-away, and all hands joined in roaring out the words as the yards were braced home:

"Once I had an Irish gal, and she was fat and lazy,
Away, haul away, Oh haul away together!
But now I got a nigger one, she nearly drives me crazy,
Away, haul away, Oh haul away jo!"

No sooner was everything belayed than the captain, a peppery old Beverly salt, emerged from the cheering, waving crowd of gold-seekers and came forward, driving all hands with him.

"All hands, all hands!" pierced his stentorian voice. "Pick watches, mister—hey there, mister! Wake up for'ard! Weather coming along fast, mister!"

The mate hastily abandoned the forecastle to Hampton and joined the skipper and the men. Caustic comments on the appearance of the hands were exchanged as the watches were picked, then the captain sent his starboard watch to get the gold company and their baggage stowed, and left the deck to the mate. Hampton had a glimpse of Nelly Barnes, standing with the other three women passengers, before they went below, as soon as the bar was crossed and the roll called.

Within half an hour only six of the company remained on deck, and these lined the rail together with most of the crew, for the *Hannah* was pitching and rolling in a choppy head sea and the wind was shrieking out of the northwest. By the time the pilot was dropped and Baker's Island left behind, snow was in the air and the wind was howling and shifting. All hands were called, sail was taken in to lower topsails and fore staysail, and when the wind settled in the north the reefed foresail was set and she began to scud madly in the gale. The only one of all the gold company who remained on deck was James Day, and he did not approach Hampton.

During the next two days, in fact, Hampton saw very little of the passengers, for the gale drove down unceasing and the few seamen aboard had their hands full. Job Warlock had gone into the starboard watch and the two friends had scant opportunity to glimpse each other. It was a wild time, huge seas battering the old brig, and the officers attempting nothing beyond getting some scotchmen rigged to keep the rigging from chafing. Then, on the third day out, when the blow had moderated to a brisk gale and things were a bit settled down, came that which Dick Hampton had both hoped and feared. He had just turned over the deck to the second mate and started forward, when at the after companion he came face to face with Nelly Barnes as she emerged from the ladder-way. She was coming on deck, alone.

Her hand flew to her throat and she stared blankly at him, all amazed, and the flush that leaped into her face died away in pallor.

"It's not you—it can't be!" she exclaimed softly.

Hampton doffed his tarpaulin hat and stood smiling at her.

"But it is, Nelly, it is!" he cried, and as her hand came out to meet his, all restraint suddenly burst within him, and eager words rushed to his lips. "Did you think I could leave you so easily, Nelly? Dear girl—dear heart—I had to be with you, to watch over you——"

He stammered and fell silent as he held her hand. Under his eyes and words, her pale face crimsoned again in its frame of brown hair, and in her wide hazel eyes he read only too surely the answer to his impulsive utterance.

"I'm glad, Dick, I'm glad!" she said simply, in that low, rich voice which so reached into his heart and soul. "Oh, Dick, I've cried to think of that morning at the crossroads—I never thought to see you again! And now to see you here seems like a miracle—but my father, my father! What will he say?" Sudden fright leaped into her face. "Dick, he mustn't see you—it will be terrible! You know how he feels——"

Hampton laughed and closed his fingers more tightly over hers.

"We're at sea, Nelly, and what can he do? Make the best of it. He won't let you see much of me, but don't worry. I'll be close at hand, dear heart; I'm to leave the brig at Chagres and go along with the company. You don't know or dream what's ahead, but I know——"

Just then two officers of the gold company appeared behind Nelly Barnes; old Eliphalat Nickerson, the president, and with him spruce Adam Johnson, the secretary. Both of them knew Hampton and greeted him with surprize and satisfaction, and after the handshaking he exchanged one look with Nelly and then went his way forward. Recollection of his own impulsive words left him tingling, for now he knew that his secret was no longer a secret, and that Nelly Barnes had welcomed him with all her heart.

That very morning the bosun tumbled down the ladder into the forepeak and broke his leg, and Job Warlock was put in his place. Since the bosun stood no regular watch but all watches, snatching time off when he could, this threw the two friends together at times. That afternoon when Hampton had the deck, Job Warlock came up to him and touched forelock with a grin.

"Bless me, what's come over ye, Dick? There I be, forgetting all proper respect! Beg pardon, sir. What an unholy old packet she is, and a crew o' greenhorns! What makes ye look so wondrous joyful, eh?"

"Reason enough, Job!" Hampton laughed cheerfully.

"Aye, the lass i' the brown hair, eh?" said Job shrewdly. "I noted her, and a fine lass she is. Well, journey's end makes lovers' meetings, they say, but we're not at Chagres yet, mark it well! Tomorrow will be a fine day, and then ye'll hear things go popping down below——"

"Belay and stand by," said Hampton suddenly, looking down the deck. "Here's the —— to pay now, Job. Stand by."

He saw Eliphalat Nickerson approaching, and beside him, still rather sickly in looks but grim and harsh as ever, Jed Barnes. Among the many gold seekers who were now on deck, Hampton saw nothing of Nelly, and was glad. Jed Barnes came on with determination in his manner, while old Nickerson pulled at his whiskers and looked confoundedly ill at ease. Straight up to Hampton they came, and Jed Barnes fastened upon him a narrow-eyed regard of suspicious hatred.

"So you're here, are ye?" he spat out. "Mighty slick galoot, ain't ye? I know why you're trailin' after me, Dick Hampton, and I warn ye here and now that I'll have none of it. Any of your antics around me or Nelly, and I'll give ye a larruping! Understand? Not a word to her, ye graceless whelp, ye runagate, ye no-account rascal, or I'll lay a stick over your shoulders! You leave our company at Chagres, understand?"

Hampton looked at him and laughed.

"Jed, you're an old fool. I could break you with one hand—and will do it yet, if you don't watch your eye. D'you think I care a tinker's dam for you or your threats? Not a bit. I'll marry Nelly, and if you don't like it you can lump it. For the rest, you're talking to a ship's officer before members of the crew. One more word out of you and you go in irons. One word!"

Jed Barnes gasped with fury, and would have spoken not one but many words—save that old Nickerson dragged him away by main force. Warlock, looking after them, rolled his quid from cheek to cheek and then grinned.

"There go two prime fools, and another two-score like 'em aboard! D'ye know that they've got all their hard cash with 'em? Aye, every cent. Some keep it in their pockets, but more ha' pooled it in a strongbox, and that box is in the keeping of our friend Day. At Chagres he'll jump ship with it. Heap good work, as the Injun said when he rubbed his belly."

Hampton frowned over this item of news.

"So? I doubt your prophecy, friend Job. True, Day may not accompany us all across to Panama, but he'll be there with the strongbox. Though I don't like him, I don't figure him as any petty rascally thief. Still, we'll see."

"And bless me if I take a notion to your godly New Englanders, any of 'em! What's this ugly old stone-face got against you?"

"He doesn't like seamen," said Hampton, and smiled.

"But his daughter does, eh? A fine lass. Bless me if I can't read the end of this trail! Howsomever, I'll go with 'ee to the parson's door, Dick, and then to Glasgow packets."

The news of what had passed between Hampton and Jed Barnes speedily ran through the ship, gaining much in the telling, so that by evening both the crew and the staggering but slowly recuperating gold seekers were half-convinced that the two men had fought that morning. Though he saw her down the deck once or twice, Hampton had no further speech with Nelly Barnes all day; at the same time, he began to realize that the gossip must be hard for her to bear, since it filled all the ship and was swift to create dissension. His brother officers and many of the Beverly men who knew him, were warm to back his love-match; but the older men among the gold seekers, all of them hard-headed New Englanders of some position and means, were as swift to back up harsh Jed Barnes.

Thus stood matters when, next morning, Hampton found the warm sunlight, a steady wind, and a running sea aiding the *Hannah* on her passage. All hands were about, high good spirits were in evidence, and the morning opened briskly to popping of rifles as the younger men opened fire on porpoises or shot at marks. After breakfast, however, the skylarking was halted and the company officers assembled the gold-seekers on the maindeck for prayers and divine service. Then, after calling the roll, a meeting of the officers within ten minutes was announced, to be held in the main cabin, and the decks were once more flooded with laughing, eager men who indulged in sports and feats of strength amid the new banging of rifles and drift of powder reek down the wind.

Hampton, off duty and enjoying a pipe near the scuttle butt, was looking on when he heard his name and turned. Approaching him was the trim and dandified secretary of the company, Adam Johnson, with Nelly Barnes on his arm.

"Er—ahem, sir! Morning to you," said Johnson affably. "I was asked to tell you, Mr. Hampton, that Mr. Barnes would like the pleasure of your company for a few moments. He is in his cabin below—Number Three of the after cabins, sir. A fine day, eh?"

"Very," said Hampton, and found Nelly's hand in his for a moment. Then he realized what had just been said, and looked at Johnson with a slight hardening of his eyes. "What's that? Jed Barnes wants to see me? Then let him come——"

The pleading look of the girl checked his words, and Adam Johnson chuckled.

"Upon my word, sir, I think you'd do well to obey the summons! We must all be friends aboard; it won't do to reach the goldfields with dissension in our midst. United we stand, divided we fall—an excellent axiom for our company, sir! I may drop the word in your ear that I've had a talk with Mr. Barnes, and I think you'd find it to your interest to see him."

Nelly smiled.

"Indeed, Dick, Mr. Johnson is a very good friend! If you'll only be a little patient with father——"

Hampton laughed, and clapped the spruce Johnson on the shoulder.

"My compliments to you, sir, and thanks! Indeed, I'll go to the slaughter as patience personified, I assure you! Quite right, Nelly; I'd do more than this for one smile from you, and you may depend on it I'll meet your father half-way in the effort to get along peaceably."

With her smile to reward him, Dick Hampton started aft. He was both astonished and highly gratified by this occurrence; Adam Johnson he knew for an honest, forthright man and a good friend. How Jed Barnes had been prevailed upon was a mystery, but no doubt several of the gold company had argued him into some appearance of decency.

"For Nelly's sake I'll do more than my part," resolved Hampton, as he came to the ladder and started below. "Perhaps the old curmudgeon has been made to see reason after all, though I doubt it. He'll probably make certain terms with me—no doubt has been forced into it for the sake of general harmony aboard."

Glancing into the main cabin, where old

Eliphalat Nickerson and one or two other officers were stuffing their pipes in readiness for the meeting, he turned into the passage and paused at the door of number three cabin, ordinarily occupied by the third mate. He knocked, but had no response. He knocked again, more loudly, since all the stern timbers were creaking and groaning, and feet were pounding the deck overhead, but still there was no answer. With that, he tried the door, found it unlocked, and stepped into the little cabin.

For a moment he was absolutely paralyzed with horror at the sight which greeted him.

Jed Barnes, clothing in wild disarray, lay on the floor beside the bunk, feebly gripping the blankets and trying to pull himself up. From his torn shirt erupted a slowly welling stream of blood, and the haft of a knife stood out from his breast. He had been stabbed, not once but several times, and the agony of death was in his wrinkled face. A sobbing cry burst from him.

"Help! Help, ye rascal——"

Hampton sprang forward, leaned to help him—and Barnes died in his arms, murdered.

VI

DICK HAMPTON tasted one of those queer, only half-realized instants which come like a flash from the blue to many men. Whether to be explained by supernatural causes as some hold, or as others deem by a working of the sixth sense or the subconscious mind, they do come. They are seldom understood until later, so that men rarely act upon the message, but interpreted by events they are remembered as fearful and wonderful flashes from the great soul of the universe. And now, as Hampton stooped over and held the dead body of Jed Barnes in his hands, he experienced one of those singular and dreadful instants.

He could hear the tramp of feet as men came running from the main cabin, drawn by that one dying cry, yet time seemed suspended. A voice yammered at his inward ear—a spiritist would have claimed it the voice of the escaping soul, but Hampton was too stunned and spellbound, too paralyzed, to explain it or even to comprehend its meaning. None the less, he seemed suddenly to hear it distinctly, to catch it tugging at his soul's elbow, startling and terrifying him with its cry, accompanied by a flash of binding light.

"He did it! He did it! Now you are lost and damned beyond recall—caught in a net too widespread for escape. No time to move, to act, to think; there is the secret of it under your very hand—and he did it! Had you come a moment sooner, you'd have caught him at work; too late, too late! Now your life is only beginning, your task lies all ahead—and he did it!"

Thus the flash of comprehension came and passed, and Hampton failed to catch it as most men fail until too late. He stood up, feeling warm blood on his hands, and stared blankly at the gaping, horrified men crowded about the doorway—Eliphalat Nickerson and the others. A shrill shout leaped to the deck above—

"Hampton's murdered Jed Barnes!"

That wakened him — roused him to startled alarm. He saw the thought echoed in the faces around him, and passionately disclaimed the fact—

"A lie! I came in and found him dying——"

The words fell away. Into the throng and through it burst the old skipper, taking in everything at a glance, facing Hampton in cold, sorrowful accusation.

"What's this, sir? What is it, I say? You did this?"

"A lie! I did not," declared Hampton vehemently. "Adam Johnson said the man wanted to see me, sent me down to him—I found him dying. I saw no one leave this cabin—before God, that is all I know of it! Would I have murdered the father of the woman I love? And look at the knife. It's not mine. I have none with me. Mine is in my own cabin, hanging on the peg."

It was nonsense to suppose that the crime could be fastened upon him, yet none the less Hampton had to face the possibility. The passage and companion were jammed with men; loud voices threatened the murderer; the confusion was uproarious. The skipper turned to Nickerson and the other company officers.

"Exert your authority, gentlemen. Every man aboard to be mustered in the waist of the ship. At once! All hands on deck!"

Then, stooping, the old skipper grasped the knife still buried in the ribs of Jed Barnes, and with an effort removed it.

"A devilish blade!" he muttered. "No

honest sea-knife. And the man that used it was disturbed at his work—had no time to pluck it free. Mr. Hampton, by my side. Leave this poor clay to be mourned by his daughter."

Gradually the flood of men receded, and the passage was emptied. As Hampton followed the captain on deck, Nelly Barnes and one of the other women came down the ladder, rushed past them, and disappeared in the red-smeared cabin.

When Hampton emerged on deck, one shout of anger went up from the waist, then was quelled. The gold company was mustered there on the starboard side, the ship's company to port. Hampton stood as in a dream, waiting, listening, watching. He perceived that in all eyes he was the murderer, and cold anger settled on him. Still, the affair was far from finished, and the owner of that knife must be discovered. He met with one cheerful grin from Job Warlock, but no other face offered him any hope.

The captain stood knife in hand at the wheel, summoned the gold company officers and his own mates, then addressed the assembled men solemnly:

"Friends, some one among us has murdered Mr. Barnes. Whether the murderer is one among you, or my third officer, remains to be seen. First of all this knife must be recognized. Let every one come aft, one at a time, and inspect the weapon."

Gravely, Adam Johnson called the roll of the company, who filed aft, followed by the crew. One by one the men came and viewed the reddened weapon, a most singular and unusual sort of knife, and denied ever having seen it before. Hampton caught the eye of James Day, who stood at the side of old Nickerson, and Day made an almost imperceptible gesture of assurance.

When it came the turn of the crew, and man after man swore that the knife was unknown to him, dismay came upon Hampton. It seemed impossible, for once seen that knife could not easily be forgotten. Vainly he searched among crew and passengers for any man who might betray signs of guilt or fear; vainly he tried to fasten on any man who might have been an enemy to Jed Barnes. Job Warlock came and stood beside him stoutly enough.

"A bad business, matey!" he said, and Hampton nodded slightly. "Bad and no mistake."

The ship's Bible was brought up, and the skipper, hearing a low mutter from the ranks in the waist, turned to them grimly.

"None o' that, my men! There'll be justice done, but it'll be mine. I'm in charge here, and Mr. Hampton is my officer—so mind that. Now, who among ye had any quarrel wi' the dead man? Come, speak up on it! Step up and swear to what ye know, and watch your words. Somebody here is a liar already, on the knife."

None moved for a moment, then old Eliphalat Nickerson came forward, pawing his whiskers, and laid his hand on the Book.

"I'll have to say what I heard yesterday," he stated solemnly, and went on to detail what had passed between Jed Barnes and Hampton. Before he finished, Nelly Barnes appeared on deck again, tears on her face, the other women comforting her. The captain turned to Hampton.

"Do you deny this testimony, Mr. Hampton?"

"It's quite true, sir," said Hampton steadily. "There is nothing to deny so far."

"Then, sir, kindly state just what happened below. On your oath, sir!"

Gravely assenting, Hampton related his entry into the cabin and what had transpired there.

"You saw no one about before you entered?"

"I saw no one leave that cabin. A good many persons were about, but I observed no one man in particular. Most of the company officers were gathered in the main cabin."

"Then who can throw light on the last person to see Mr. Barnes alive?" demanded the skipper, and repeated the query. None answered, until at last Adam Johnson stood up. He told how he and Barnes had been talking, and how Barnes had agreed to dismiss his vindictive hatred of Hampton; how Nelly had joined them, how he and Nelly had then gone on deck in search of Hampton and had found the latter.

"At the outside," he concluded, "not more than ten minutes could have elapsed since we left Mr. Barnes, to the time Mr. Hampton found him."

"Do you confirm this, Miss Nelly?" asked the skipper. Nelly Barnes lifted her tear-wet face, threw Hampton one look, and nodded.

"Yes. And I want to say here that I

know Dick Hampton never murdered my father!"

"Then," said the captain, "can you suggest any one else as the guilty person?"

Pallor swept into the girl's face.

"No," she said, and abruptly fainted.

"Poor girl! Take her below to my cabin," said the skipper, and the other women obeyed the order.

When the stir was over, and Nelly gone from the deck, Hampton felt quick relief. Her brave stand-up for him, her belief in him, had effected nothing at all. In the eyes around him he perceived that he was doomed. Day was speaking earnestly to Nickerson and Adam Johnson, and he wondered what this bronzed and vigorous man was arguing.

"Now, friends," said the captain, "can any of ye throw any light on this affair? Can ye throw any suspicion on another man—if it be my own self? Speak up!"

There was no response. Men whispered together, stared aft, moved uneasily. James Day went on talking with Nickerson, as if urging some course of action. Hampton looked about from face to face, that cold anger settled upon him, wakening all his false pride, stirring a fierce resentment that these men should deem him guilty on such evidence.

Suddenly one or two men amidships, who had earlier in the morning been shooting at marks, whipped up their rifles. Instantly the captain leaped in front of Hampton, and his voice cracked:

"You, there! Down with them guns. Mister, hey, mister! Disarm every mother's son aboard and chuck the guns down below. Leap alive—go with him, bosun!"

There was a growl, a sullen bandying of words, but the mate obeyed and came aft with the rifles. Then men stirred, and voices leaped up tumultuously.

"Because he's a sailor, ye'll do naught to him! Ye'll shield him! Are we to be murdered by your seamen and nothin' done?"

"Belay! Silence!" roared the skipper furiously. "I'll do no such thing. Mr. Hampton, will ye stand trial here and now?"

Hampton started.

"Trial! Yes, I will; but no such trial can be legal. What do ye propose to do if I'm found guilty—hang me?"

The captain turned to him and spoke in a low voice.

"It's touch and go—if they rush me, they'll murder you!" Then, raising his voice, "You four Nantucket men in the sta'board watch, lay aft here! Mister, you and the second mate join 'em. Now, Mr. Nickerson, pick six of your own men to make up a jury. Make a record o' this, Mr. Johnson."

Nickerson began to pick his men, with some protest as to the legality of the affair, and Day crossed the deck to where Hampton and Job Warlock stood.

"Sorry, lad," he said quickly. "They're ripe to mob you, and we must hold 'em off. I've put a flea in Nickerson's ear. Accept the judgment of the court, savvy? It's the best I could do for ye. Otherwise it means ye go into irons and back wi' the brig to Beverly to stand trial, and some of the company with ye. Remember, now."

Day turned away, and Hampton perceived the singular nature of the dilemma which faced all hands. The logical thing, indeed, was to throw him in irons if adjudged guilty and this meant that he would lie a prisoner until the brig returned north; it also meant that some of the gold company must return, to give evidence. The prospect suited him no better than it did them, yet he could not tamely accept any verdict rendered in the forming sea-court. Or could he? Day had been at work. Day urged him to accept what was given—had no doubt suggested something.

"I'd do it, matey," said Job Warlock soberly. "It's a —— of a pinch, but that chap has his brains at work for us. Cheer up! The world's a fine place, so hurray!"

The jury now picked, and ranged on the quarterdeck, the captain took charge again.

"Gentlemen, you're here to render a verdict in this matter. You've heard the evidence, you know what's happened. Somebody aboard here has lied about that knife. Now, Mr. Hampton, if you can bring up any evidence in your own favor, the deck is yours."

Hampton smile darkly.

"Who accuses me?"

"I do," said old Nickerson, but without heat. "The dead man cried, by your own statement and ours who heard it: 'Help, ye rascal!' Explain that away if ye can."

"There's nothing to explain." Hampton regarded the jury steadily. "I've told what took place; my own knife is hanging in my cabin; I brought no baggage aboard, and have never seen this knife until today. I was not below with Jed Barnes long enough to struggle with him, much less inflict several wounds. That's all I have to say."

"But I've a word, if ye please," spoke out Job Warlock stoutly, and stepped forward. The captain nodded to him. "I've sailed wi' Dick Hampton afore this, and know him. He's no man to use knife. Why, ye lubbers, he can sail a ship better than all of ye put together! I've seen him lay out stu'nsails when every other ship in sight was under lower topsails——"

"That's enough," snapped the captain. "If ye've no better evidence to offer than friendship, my man, keep quiet. Anything more, Mr. Hampton?"

"Go on with the farce," said Hampton, and began to fill his pipe.

An angry murmur greeted this, then Nickerson spoke out:

"Cast your vote, jury. No prejudice for or against. Vote on the evidence alone."

Adam Johnson provided scraps of paper and a pencil, which went from hand to hand. Watching it as he puffed, amid a dead silence, Hampton had no need to ask what was written down; the swift and nervous gestures, the one word scrawled on each bit of paper, told their own story. When the first mate, acting as foreman, had collected the papers, he looked them over and turned.

"Guilty," he said in a low voice.

There was a stir. The crowd in the waist surged forward. Nickerson checked them with hand uplifted, then spoke to the captain, by whose elbow James Day was now standing.

"This is no legal court, sir. We can take no action on this verdict——"

"But ye can, if Mr. Hampton will abide by it," said the skipper quickly. An ominous growl from the crowd of men emphasized his words. "What say ye, mister?"

There was another silence, and in it Hampton caught a mutter from Job Warlock:

"Bless me, if it ain't all cut and dried!"

Cut and dried indeed! Hampton smiled, and his anger broke out coldly.

"If you expect me to accept hanging from such a court, you're mistaken," he said. "Anything short of that will serve well enough, until I can make appeal to the law."

"Good enough, then," exclaimed the captain hurriedly, and exchanged a word with Day. "Mr. Nickerson, I call upon you to give sentence."

Cut and dried! Hampton felt curiously detached as he listened, and watched old Nickerson pawing his whiskers nervously. What was it that Day had arranged? Whither was this whole farcical business tending? Then he heard Nickerson's voice, and in shocked silence realized what words were being spoken.

"— that the murderer's weapon be slung about his neck, and he be placed adrift in an open boat to await the judgment of heaven."

Upon the silence that ensued, burst a torrent of oaths from Job Warlock.

"It's murder, I tell ye!" roared the bo'sun profanely. "Before it's done, I'll knife any man that tries—why, ye villainous rascals! Mutiny or no, I'll——"

"Be silent!" cried Hampton, waking to the situation. "This can not be done, men! I refuse to accept such a sentence!"

Day was swiftly at his side with anxious words:

"Quiet, quiet! D'ye not see there's no danger in it? A day or so afloat, and the glass well up, and in the ship lane too——"

Hampton brushed him aside impatiently.

"I refuse!" he cried, above the rising storm of voices. "It shall not be done——"

True, he was thinking more of Nelly Barnes than of any possible danger, but had small time to reflect on anything. With a rush and a storm of shouts, the crowd in the waist broke over the after deck. Captain and mates were swept aside, and the maddened torrent poured down upon Hampton. The first who leaped at him fell under the fist of Job Warlock, who whipped out his knife and began to drive it home, but to no avail; the mob hemmed in the two men at the rail, and tore at them.

Hampton's fists lashed, and Job drove with knife and boot until some one fetched him a crack over the head and knocked him senseless. Then Hampton, alone, went down under main force of numbers—was dragged to the deck, felt himself smitten, kicked, finally bound hand and foot.

Through all this a voice pierced to him; it was a new and vibrant voice, the echoing brazen notes of a seaman, but one he had not heard previously.

"All hands to stations!" he heard it ring forth. "By the braces, there, stand by! Down stu'nsails—down, I say! Now, then, helm—hard down, hard down! Lean to it—down! Up with your braces—brace up, brace up! That's the way of it—shiver her, now! Hold her so——"

The yards backed, the ship came up into the wind. Over the whole deck prevailed fearful confusion, the seamen not knowing whence came that strange voice, yet obeying its commands, the captain and mates hemmed in at the rail and fighting to control the crowd, others rushing forward to where the boats were slung. These carried with them Hampton and the senseless bosun. Once more that strange but authoritative voice pierced above the din.

"Ready? Lower away—away!"

There was a squeaking of turning sheaves—Hampton felt himself flung into a boat, felt something slung about his neck; he could see nothing for the blood that ran into his eyes and blinded him, and realized that his senses were slipping away, for he had endured much. The boat struck the water. From above still came a confused din of voices, shouts, execrations, wild threats and wilder orders from the helpless officers; and through them all one piercing scream in a woman's voice. Then the shrill tones of Eliphalat Nickerson quavered high.

"We'll not pay for the boat!" the old man was crying. "Ye need not charge that to the company, I say—boats come high, and we'll not——"

"Cast off, cast off!" rang out that strange new voice, and the falls were cast off.

Hampton, with a quick movement, recovered himself for an instant and shaking his head dashed the blood from his eyes. For one moment he had clear vision, and looked upward. There he saw the face of James Day thrust over the rail, looking down at him—and a wild, cruel laugh was on that face. Then Hampton realized whose voice had been giving those orders.

"Cut and dried!" he muttered. "Aye, cut and dried——" and so muttering fell unconscious.

VII

AFTERNOON, and the empty, open boat rocking to the long swinging swell of the seas; empty, save for the two men who sat in her, alive once more in the warm sunlight. No mast or sail or oar was in the boat, no water or food, not even a tiller.

Battered and bruised, the two men had used teeth and fingers to get free of their bonds, and after bandaging each other sat smoking thirstily, silent for a long while, their eyes roving about the empty horizon. Job Warlock had a swollen jaw and a black eye, Dick Hampton had a slashed scalp and a dozen minor contusions, and about his neck still dangled the knife by its lanyard. Gradually their thoughts were gaining coherence, gradually Hampton was remembering everything of that wild and fearful scene aboard the vanished *Hannah*. He broke the silence at length, with slow words!

"Cut and dried, you said, Job. Did ye catch that voice giving orders?"

Warlock shook his head in perplexity.

"Aye, but I was a bit hurt and dazed. 'Twas no voice I had heard before, Dick. Could swear to that. A proper seaman's voice."

Hampton's puffed lips curved slightly in a smile.

"Day's voice. I caught a glimpse of him at the rail above, as we were cast off. All cut and dried."

Job Warlock stared, and presently uttered a slow, thoughtful whistle.

"Whew! Queer enough, matey, queer enough. It's all a riddle, and where's the key?"

"It's to find," said Hampton grimly. "If you'd seen Day's grin, you'd understand; it was malignant, bitter, venomous. There was hidden poison in the man, but why? I've never done him harm."

The brown, squat face of Job Warlock wrinkled up, and he puffed hard at his pipe. Dick Hampton was searching for some reason behind everything, but could find none. The whole thing seemed outrageous, without explanation. He was still slow to realize that from the moment of Jed Barnes' murder, his fate had been decided—there had been a slow culmination of events, yet everything had been cut and dried, planned out to the last detail. Who and why? If by Day, then for what reason? With a shiver, Hampton loosed the knife from about his neck and flung it into the stern of the boat.

Warlock straightened up suddenly on his thwart.

"By the crooked tree—let's trace the riddle, and seek the key afterward! So it was Day as done it, eh? It was him directing things?"

"Aye," said Hampton. "He suggested the sentence to old Nickerson, and it seemed all fair enough. Otherwise, d'ye see, I'd ha' been put in irons for trial on return to Beverly, which would have suited me poorly indeed, for I have work to do. But let's work back slowly. It was not in Nickerson's mind, of course, or the skipper's either, to set us adrift without food or sail; with them, we'd not be badly off. As it is now——"

"It's nothin' short of murder," said Job Warlock, "and it's Day's doin', too. It was him caught the crowd all aback, drove orders at 'em, cast us adrift; so that's settled. Aye, we did wrong to trust the rogue! Was it him murdered the old man?"

Hampton shook his head.

"Wait; come to that later. Why should Day have gone out of his way to take us aboard ship, only to work this game on us? It looks queer, Job. He'd have murdered me instead of setting me adrift, had he dared do it. Why, then, would he want me killed, after taking me along and promising me command of a schooner?"

"Hm! Where was he when the murder was done?"

"I don't know—ah!" Hampton checked himself, recollecting. "He was in the after cabin with the other company officers—I remember seeing him there as I glanced in."

"Could he have done the job, then slipped into the after cabin?"

Hampton shrugged, frowned, puffed for a moment at his emptied pipe.

"Hard to say; it's possible, of course. Yet, why would he have killed Jed Barnes?"

"Well, work it out and we'll find a key." Warlock slipped off the thwart, settled himself in the bottom of the boat, bracing himself to the swing and the fall. "Where'd ye see him first, and how?"

"By chance. Pure chance."

Hampton recounted in detail his first meeting with James Day. For both of them, this effort to pierce the mystery not only had its own end to be attained, but served to relieve their thoughts. They were already suffering from thirst, because of their hurts and because of the lack of water itself affecting their imagination; both men realized clearly the peril of letting their minds dwell upon their almost hopeless circumstance.

"First meetin', then, all pure chance," commented Job Warlock. "Fair enough; he had need of you, like he said, so set that down to his side of the ledger. He took me on for the same reason, and that's all square. Now, then, what was it come up to change him——"

"Ah!" Hampton's gray eyes lighted with a sudden flash of recollection. "That night, after he took you to your quarters, he came back and offered me introductions to friends of his in the Panama country—filibusters or pirates, no matter which. Said I could make my fortune in a year, throw in with him! When I refused, there were no hard words, but there was a look in his eye——"

"Too fast, too fast, matey! Take in a reef," cried out Warlock in swift animation. "D'ye remember how he jerked out the little pistol on us? How it was that story of your brother—oh, I see it now, the trail's all clear! The world's a fine place, so hurray!"

The half-breed's swarthy features were agleam with exultation, with wolfish eagerness. He was scenting out this mental trail as he would follow any forest track, and seemingly he had now found the hidden clue. He leaned forward, dark eyes blazing.

"Listen, matey! Oh, it's clear as day now, aye, *Day!*" His lips drew back from his teeth in a snarling grin, and he checked himself to find the right words. "That letter from your brother—why, news of that hit him between wind and water! Caught him flat aback. What a shift o' wind it was for him! Stripped him to bare poles, and out came the pistol!"

Hampton caught the implication.

"Go on," he said grimly. "You've hit it. Next?"

"Little black bull came down from the mountain," sang Warlock, and laughed. "Oh, aye, clear as Day himself now! That mention of the letter, of your errand, of the man who had caught your brother atrip—Winslow!"

"His bitterest enemy," said Hampton, and frowned. "Yet how that could have changed him toward me, made him hate me, I don't quite see! The man Winslow——"

"Not Winslow, not Winslow!" cried out the other eagerly. "It was a false trail, and it threw us all off! Not Winslow at all!"

"What are ye driving at, man?"

"Dias! What's that but Spanish for

Day? Why, there's the man himself ye were seeking! No wonder he demanded why ye sought Winslow or Dias, was afraid to speak out——"

A groan of mingled fury and bitterness broke from Dick Hampton, as across his mind burst realization of the truth. Dias—James Day in person! No wonder Day had said that Dias was his bitterest enemy; true enough in all conscience!

Hampton waved his friend to silence, lowered his face into his hands, sat gripped in furious and futile quest of memory. One thing after another flooded in upon him, now that he understood the truth. This adventurer must have operated under a dozen names; no wonder that Job Warlock had heard of the filibuster Day, and again of the supposed Mexican Dias. Hampton saw that from the moment he had told James Day of his errand, he had been marked for death. At first eager to enlist a lieutenant and assistant, Day had then become more desperately eager to get rid of a man who might surprize his secret at any time.

And with this, abruptly, the whole affair began to broaden out in the light of that letter from Eli Hampton.

"If we'd only learned all this a day sooner!" and Hampton lifted his head, with another groan. "Now we're helpless."

"Better late than never," said Job Warlock cheerfully. "We've done well to find this much of a key, matey; it don't take many words to understand the game friend Dias is playing now, eh? No wonder he wanted to be rid of us. No matter what happens now, he's won his game."

This was horribly true. It stood out clearly that Day, or more truly Dias, was one of those vultures who were now preying upon the flood of gold-seekers pouring across the isthmus or working up the west coast—not Americans only, but men of all nations. Owing to the expense of the journey, the average gold-seeker carried enough money to get him to his destination, and this was no small sum.

Dias, then, was not only a vulture, whose activities were clearly exposed in the letter from Eli, but was carrying on his activities on a large scale; Hampton stood aghast at the man's incredible audacity. Coming to New England, Dias had swiftly organized his company, with very plausible secrecy, from picked men of means. Perhaps the wealthiest in that company had been Jed Barnes, and none of them were poor men. Lured by the prospect of an assured and swift California passage under experienced auspices, they had trusted themselves to Dias—and what would be the end of this affair?

"Damnation, damnation!" cried Hampton, as the prospect burned into him, torturing him with the anguish of his own futility. "Those whom he can't rob and strip along the isthmus, he'll pack into his schooners at Panama and rob on the way north—they'll never see California at all! He'll land them somewhere in Mexico, penniless and broken—he's not a man but a devil! If we were at Chagres——"

"Take it calm, matey, for it can't be helped," said Job Warlock coolly. "If we were at Chagres this blessed minute, waiting for him, what could we do? Nothing. You're a convicted murderer, I ain't nothin' but a common A. B., more or less. Depend on it, he's greased them dago officials to the limit. And who'll listen to us aboard ship? Nary a one, be sure of that. He's got them poor fools eating out of his hand, matey. Now listen here! Has the rascal got his eye on the lass, think ye?"

Hampton started, then shook his head. He had with his seaman's papers that letter from his brother Eli, and got out the oilskin packet. He showed Warlock the letter, which sufficiently removed any such conjecture as the bosun had put forth.

"Well, then, you and me better go to Chagres and look up this here Injun, El Hambre," said Warlock. "Bet you a plugged two-cent piece we can work fine with him. Injun does it, every time. But if Dias ain't stuck on the girl, you can be sure it was him knifed the old man; sure as shootin', matey!"

Hampton nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, but it can't be proved. And he's probably scheming for all the money Jed Barnes had. What will become of Nelly, then? That devil won't spare her——"

The blood rushed to his face. Warlock laid one powerful hand on his arm, restrainingly.

"Steady, matey! Brace up the yards and sheet home; she ain't goin' to suffer in a hurry. She's safe enough far's Chagres, and likely them other women will look after her to Panama. It's there that Dias will work his deviltry—there and after, up the west coast. Now come back to the job which we ain't finished. Where's that knife?"

Hampton retrieved the weapon from its position in the stern and they examined it for the first time, with quick interest.

The blade was not extraordinary, being of that universal and deadly fashion known to the whole frontier, north and south, as a Bowie. The handle, however, was most peculiar; Hampton recalled the skipper's comment that the murderer would never have left such a knife had he been given time to withdraw and remove it. The haft, with its short cross-guard, was of solid and heavy silver, intricately fashioned in the shape of an angel whose wings formed the guard, a hole between the feet carrying a stout ring through which the lanyard ran.

"Spanish or Mex work," observed Job Warlock, "and durned pretty work, too. What's them figures on the back, matey? Mean anythin' to you?"

Hampton shook his head. On the back of the angel were graven, or chiseled, two characters, running deeply into the metal, one above the other. To Hampton they meant nothing:

"All Greek to me," he responded. "Are they Mexican Indian?"

"Don't look like it, only I'm no judge," said Warlock. "Well, the knife don't tell us much—but hang on to it. Better lay off smokin' that 'bacca and chew it. Good for what ails us both right now. Hard times ahead, as the Injun said when he rubbed his belly."

Hampton occupied himself with cleaning the knife, and presently slung it about his neck once more, beneath his shirt.

The afternoon was nearly gone, and the sun went westering with never a fleck of sail to break the rim of the horizon. The boat rose and fell monotonously to the lift of the long seas, and as the slow darkness drew down the two men who sat in her were fully aware of what future they faced. The crafty guile of Dias, who had so cunningly twisted to his own advantage all the little happenings aboard ship and so masterfully dominated the sequence of events, had doomed them. They realized that without food or water they had practically no hope, for the chance that any ship would pick them up within a week was negligible in the extreme.

Yet, as they sat and rocked to the motion of the boat, they talked of Chagres and Panama, and of the future.

BOUND WEST

I

WHEN the *Veronique* of Bordeaux cast anchor in the shallow harbor of Chagres, there was no ship in port except one steamer of the Atlantic Steamship Company; the *Hannah* of Beverly had come and gone again. The company of gold-seekers aboard the French ship, who called themselves the *Compagnie de l'Ouest d'Or*, now experienced the same adventures which met all companies, of whatever nation, landing at Chagres.

The inimitable "Doc" White, an enterprizing Yankee, was first aboard the ship, and with praiseworthy energy contracted for delivery of all freight and luggage across the isthmus—half the payment in advance. He then rushed ashore to get his lighters out to the ship, and that was the last seen of the gentleman. Meantime, the harbor sharks were enjoying huge feasts, and constant explosions were taking place in the bowels of the *Veronique* as rotten tinned meats and provisions let fly; a stream of tins were going overboard. No one got ashore from the French ship that evening, except two castaways who had been picked up at sea—two dark, bearded, silent survivors of a foundered American fishing smack. These two, who spoke Spanish fluently, and who were well provided with money, greased the palm of the port officer and went ashore with him.

Eagerly enough, the Frenchmen piled ashore next morning, delighted with the golden oranges and bananas, the green jungle, the gaily colored birds and the chattering monkeys; sight of the crumbling and dismantled fortifications wakened their romance, which did not wane at closer view of the thirty miserable huts which made up the village, and the two wretched hotels. Romance presently gave way to more prosaic feelings, however, when they left their luggage piled along the beach and set out to obtain passage to Panama. Voluble Frenchmen engaged in high talk with silent, shrugging peons, obtained interpreters, arranged for boats and mules, paid over money on account, and then returned to the beach to find most of their luggage stolen. Lusty Gallic voices arose on the morning air, there was shrugging and shouting and swearing on all sides; brown men gazed placidly at the excitement; the Frenchmen, each of whom had brought huge quantities of baggage, rushed madly to the town again to find their carriers, only to discover these missing; then back to the beach, to see that a good half of the remaining goods had mysteriously disappeared. Grinning Indians and mestizos regarded the confusion with appreciation.

The two castaways stood on the hillside above the river, surveying the boats and the wild turmoil along the beach. One of them, whose cool gray eyes gleamed like ice above his half-grown fair beard, turned to his swart companion.

"Let 'em work out their own salvation, Job. They'd never be able to get all their stuff to the isthmus, anyway; the less they have to carry, the better. Had we better look up our boatman and get off? Wish I could shave these whiskers."

Job Warlock tucked a big quid of tobacco away and grinned.

"Never mind your hankerings, matey—stick to business! Our job is to get to Panama and pick up news of the company. If that Dias is what we think him, you may be sure he has posted men here to watch for us, and our only chance is to slip along unknown. Yes, we'd better find that Indian and get moving."

"There's the fellow," said Hampton suddenly, and pointed. "Bargaining with those three Frenchmen. I'll go and attend to him—you grab his boat, that big canoe with the second man in it. We'll take along that French chap who was white to us, eh?"

"Right," said Warlock, and swung off down the slope.

Dick Hampton approached the group of three gesticulating men who bargained with the swarthy half-Indian boatman. The latter had on the previous evening agreed to take the two friends up to Gorgona for eight dollars per head, and had been paid half the sum in advance; he now totally ignored Hampton and attempted to wave him away.

"So that's your game, eh?" said Hampton in Spanish, and reached out.

A howl broke from the boatman. Hampton gripped him by his long, greasy hair, bent him around, and kicked him vigorously, then, using the hair as a bridle, guided him toward the boats, amid fervent wailings and protestations. Job Warlock, meantime, had taken possession of the big canoe in even more vigorous fashion, and the astonished crowd of Frenchmen beheld the "savages" subside into meek and frightened obedience. Hampton summoned a bearded son of Bordeaux who had given them many kindnesses aboard the *Veronique*, got him stowed in the canoe with his luggage, and in five minutes the long craft swung off upstream. Catching the idea of how to handle the natives, the French Company at once went to work, and Hampton looked back to see carriers at work and boats being laden. He laughed grimly, serene in the knowledge that their kindly guest knew no English.

"They've lost their awe of the bare-footed soldiers in the ruined fort—well, we've a good start on the crowd, Job! We'd better rush our friend here right across to Panama, and pass for Frenchmen."

"And meantime," added Job sagely, "do our durndest to get in touch with El Hambre."

Very cautious inquiries, the previous night, had elicited the information that the *Hannah* was a week ahead of them; and, apparently, Dias had made good his promises as to transport, for the company had gone forward without delay. Delays at Chagres were not desirable, as Hampton had already discovered, for the two wretched hotels were filled with non-paying guests, while native huts or tents were rendered terrible by clouds of mosquitoes, together with scorpions, snakes and millepeds. The old town abounded in all manner of insect life, and there were no sanitary conditions whatever.

All this, however, now mattered nothing to Hampton, as the canoe slid up the river at good speed, and the jungled walls on either hand opened up new vistas with every moment. Like Chagres itself, the river was at first glance beautiful, with its vivid green walls, its numberless monkeys, darting toucans and parrots, splashes of gay flower growths. It soon palled, however, for mosquitoes swarmed in clouds, there was no breath of wind, and a miasmatic vapor clung to the edges of the stream.

The Frenchman was supplied with rifle and shotgun and several small arms of various makes, including two revolvers; and late in the afternoon he succeeded in bringing down two wild turkeys. Hampton forced the boatmen to keep at work, instead of landing immediately, and not until the sun was nearly down did he let them seek a camping place, for he was determined to make Gorgona by the following night. With the turkeys cooked as only Job Warlock could manage, the discomforts of the night camp were forgotten—but Hampton slept in the canoe, to make certain that the boatmen did not decamp.

With a bonus promised for making Gorgona, the two mestizos worked more cheerfully the next day, and managed to accomplish the usual three-day trip before the second night set in. The sun was not yet vanished when the canoe drew in to the bank and the *voyageurs* stepped ashore at Gorgona—a large place containing nearly a thousand souls, nestling under a hill. Here began the trail to Panama, twenty five miles away.

By the time the three paid off their men, hired a hut for the night and cleaned it, and got something to eat, darkness had fallen. They were sitting about their fire, smoking furiously to daunt the mosquitoes, when an American voice lifted out of the night:

"Hullo thar, pards! Heard a boat had come in, and come along to pay a visit."

Into the firelight emerged a thin scarcrow, shaking with fever, a ragged serape flung over his shoulders. He shook hands delightedly, with a storm of questions.

"Where ye from? What company? Another ship come in? My gosh, now thar'll be another —— rush acrost to blue water and more tents on the Panama beach! Me, I'm just back. Goin' home, you bet. Been over thar three months and nary a berth to be had. Got enough o' pelicans and bugs and niggers. Where ye from, anyhow? Tom Smith, Hartford, is my handle."

Hampton explained in Spanish that a French company had arrived, and Smith was properly disgusted at finding no English speech among the three. He understood and spoke a little Spanish, however, and informed them that Panama was crowded with gold-seekers, and the only chance of getting to California lay in shipping south to Callao and catching a north-bound ship there. Every such ship was crowded by the time it touched at Panama.

"The last company acrost had a tough time," went on Smith, in a mixture of Spanish and English. "Beverly men, and most of 'em are stuck in Panama now. I hear somebody ran off with their money, left 'em stranded here at Gorgona or in the jungle beyond. Some got through and went along in a schooner that was waiting for 'em——"

"Were there any women in the party?" demanded Hampton, catching a swift look from Job Warlock. Smith nodded.

"*Si*, señor, some few. One señorita, *muy hermosa*, you bet! About thirty of them poor —— are stuck in Panama now. The others got off all right. Say, could you señores lend me enough *dinero* to get me to Chagres?"

Warlock produced a gold coin, Hampton another, and Smith was overjoyed. He gave them advice on securing mules here, and on behalf of the Frenchmen who were following, Warlock undertook to arrange for these. Their French companion was only too glad to stay in Gorgona and keep the muleteers under constraint until his friends arrived. So Job went out with Smith, and in half an hour was back with a number of peons. Matters were arranged promptly, and after shaking their blankets for stray scorpions, the three rolled up for the night.

"You and me," said Job softly, in Hampton's ear, "can light out in the mornin' afoot, since we ain't got no luggage. Smith give me a tip. All these greenhorns are bound and determined to ride, on account of snakes; but it's a heap better and quicker to go afoot. Them mules are razor-backed, savvy? Mostly half-dead, too. All the carrying is done by peons. We can pack our blankets and make Panama tomorrow night with luck. Ain't that news about our Beverly company, though?"

"Bad news," said Hampton. "Just as we thought. Dias robbed and left most of them, and took the others along. I'm beginning to think that if he'd brought me and placed me in charge, I'd have suffered for it."

"Sure—he'd have left you to swaller the blame, and most likely the police at Panama would have jailed you, while that skunk slid off with the loot. But say!" and Warlock's voice became suddenly tense and eager, "I got a line on that Hambre Injun! He's comin' in from Panama tomorrow, and we'll meet him sure. Heard a couple o' dagoes talkin' about him. Dias didn't know it was him sent that letter from your brother?"

"No."

"That's why he's alive. Get to sleep. now, and be up early."

Sleep was slow in coming to Hampton, for his thoughts were all with Nelly Barnes and the men from Beverly, and he was confronted by a new perplexity. It was easy to see just how Dias had played his bold stroke; he had gone on to Panama with the officers and those chosen few whom he had not cajoled into parting with their money, and had loaded them aboard his schooner—simply abandoning those who had entrusted their funds to him. It had been done plausibly, of course, and the dozen who had embarked with Nelly were still probably unaware of their leader's perfidy. Since that schooner was certainly not bound for California, whither was it taking them?

"Perhaps up the coast, perhaps to that hidden place Dias has built," thought Hampton. "But—we can't be seen in Panama! Some of those Beverly men would be sure to recognize me, despite this beard. Well, wait and see. They might have me jailed as a murderer, and they might not. First thing is to meet El Hambre."

With daybreak, the two were up and preparing their packs of blankets and food. Upon parting, the Frenchman insisted volubly that each should take a derringer and a revolver from his ample store—indeed, he opened a trunk to disclose a small arsenal, which now he sadly realized was destined to be of no particular use to him. So, thus armed, Hampton and Warlock bade him farewell, and got out of the town quietly enough.

No guide was necessary; before them opened up the narrow, rocky trail that wound over the mountain flanks to the jungle beyond, and they struck off briskly. Once well on their way, which promised to be deserted until noon at least, Hampton voiced a thought that had been troubling him.

"Job, are you sure you didn't misunderstand what you heard last night, about El Hambre?"

Warlock showed a flash of teeth through his whiskers.

"You bet, but I didn't want to do too much talkin' in the hut. Somethin' mighty queer about that hombre, by the way those peons were talking. I couldn't get it all, but gathered he was a bandit or somethin' like that. Anyhow, we're sure to meet him—one good thing about this trail, a body can't get lost on it. Like goin' to the main royal yard; there's only one way to do it. How are you and me goin' to show up in Panama City, though? Some o' them Beverly men are sure to spot us, beard or no beard."

"I was thinking the same thing, Job. We'd better lie low when we get there—go out only at night. Luckily, we had our money with us when Dias set us adrift; so we can buy ourselves Spanish outfits. Might be a good notion to call ourselves Basques, too, since we talk Spanish."

Presently the sun was up, and they paused for a bite of breakfast, then on again. The road was no more than a trail over rough rocks, half-cleared and by no means easy to negotiate even without loads; how porters carrying two hundred-weight could manage it, Hampton failed to see. Repeatedly it led through deep sunless chasms in the side of the mountain, barely four feet wide and with precipitous walls on either hand, where seepage and travel had created patches of apparently bottomless adobe mud; and remembering the emaciated, staggering mules they had seen at Gorgona, Hampton quite approved Tom Smith's tip that they go forward afoot.

The sun was high overhead when they left the first portion of the trail behind and entered into the jungle. Here the trail wound with many meanderings through high walls of green, whose interlaced vines and branches overhead completely shut out the sun and formed a hot and steamy obscurity below. Here and there, beside the trail, was set up a crude native shrine to commemorate some deed of blood in times past. On and on they pushed, and by midday they had encountered half a dozen bloated or half-stripped carcasses of mules, over which hung clouds of loathsome vultures and other carrion birds.

It was quite high twelve, and a little after, when they came to a sun-bathed opening, where a trickle of water and a wide mud flat marked the course of a rivulet across the trail. On the near bank was set up a shrine, tattered and despoiled by weather, and Job Warlock proposed that they halt for a rest and a bite to eat. Hampton assented gladly—both men were dripping with perspiration and exhausted by the intense humidity of the jungle trail, which was far more tiring than any acutal exertion. When Hampton would have flung himself down carelessly, however, the crafty Warlock intervened.

"Hold on! The less we show ourselves the better, matey; lay up to one side, off the trail. We're liable to meet carriers comin' from the west 'most any time now."

Hampton nodded, and followed his companion in behind the screen of brush. Here they hacked out a small cleared space with their knives and settled down to eat and smoke and drink of the clear cold water furnished by the rivulet. Hot as was the jungle, this one spot was washed clear of humidity by the intense and burning sunlight, and afforded vast relief. When they lighted their pipes, it was almost in comfort.

"This is a right smart spot to lay up for anybody comin' from Panama," said Warlock in a low voice, pointing to the opening in the sunlight. "They got to cross the crick and that there patch o' mud, which is sticky as glue, then they got to come right up the trail to here, opposite us. If we step out, then what? They sure can't go back in any hurry."

Hampton gave him a curious glance.

"Eh? What's in your mind?"

"I dunno, for a fact," said Warlock, "but I got a feelin' that somethin's on the way to us—you needn't laugh, neither. Remember that time aboard the *Watersprite*, when I felt like that, and we got a durned quick shift o' wind that stripped us off bare and sent 'Nigger Joe' to glory? I got the same feelin' now. If anybody shows up, douse that pipe."

Hampton nodded and waited frowningly, his eyes peering through the leafy screen and watching the opposite side of the opening, across the mud flat, where the western end of the trail debouched on the creek. He had none too much faith in Job Warlock's premonition, yet he knew that the man had sometimes an uncanny ability to sense trouble or peril.

Then, abruptly, there came a breath of motion among the bushes on the farther bank, and a moving object appeared.

Hampton laid down his pipe suddenly, pressed the tobacco into the bowl, and lay motionless. Warlock followed suit, squinting. A mule, heavily loaded, was descending the creek bank, and now began to pick his way gingerly across the rivulet and the mud flat beyond. The mud clogged him, holding him to a slow and sucking pace. He struggled forward to firm ground and stood there waiting. Behind him, a man, appeared descending the bank, then a second man.

Hampton's eyes widened. The first man was a Chinaman, heavy-set and burly of aspect, with black silk coat and trousers but wearing a belted horse-pistol. The second man was an Indian, very swarthy, very tall and lank; a plaited grass sombrero hid his features and a scarlet serape was swung across his shoulders. The two men were talking as they came into sight, and stopped for a moment to watch the mule, while the Indian lighted a *cigarito*. Then the Chinaman came on across the rivulet, showing high boots beneath flapping trouser-ends, and began to pick his way across the mud.

The Indian followed more leisurely, yet with a certain cat-like grace of movement. He caught up with his companion when the latter was nearly through the sticky adobe mud, and made some remark, to which the yellow man returned a grunting response.

Then the Indian flung away his *cigarito* with a wide sweep of his arm. His hand darted beneath his serape, plucked forth a flashing blade of steel, and drove it forward into the back of the Chinaman. The act was deliberate, deadly and swift as the lashing stroke of a fer-de-lance, and as murderous. The yellow man emitted one agonized gulp, and pitched forward dead. The mule reached up his head to tug at some leaves, and his bell tinkled on the hot silence. The Indian stood motionless for a moment, thrust away his knife, and calmly began to roll another *cigarito* of tobacco and thin paper.

Hampton, paralyzed by the swiftness of it all, turned blazing eyes to Warlock, who gripped his wrist. The same thought was in the minds of both men.

"We got him," murmured Warlock. "Ready? Up and out——"

They burst out together, then Warlock leaped into the trail, Hampton waiting on one knee, revolver steadied. The murderer was caught indeed, and realized it; he stood staring at them, his smoke half-rolled, the menace of their weapons holding him immobile.

"*Los manos arriba!*" snapped Hampton, and the Indian lifted his hands.

"We got him," said Warlock, "and got him red-handed! He was guiding this chink, savvy? Planned to murder and rob him."

The Indian stood like a graven image; under the wide brim of his hat, his flashing eyes drove from one to the other of the two men. Hampton rose and stepped forward. He could not understand the stolid immobility of the murderer, whose attitude held no cringing fear, and who gave expression to none of the usual plaints and wails of a frightened mestizo. He seemed, indeed, to stand there in proud scorn of the two men who had surprized him, nor did he move when Job Warlock stepped around to his other side, quite cutting off any retreat.

"So you thought you could murder that man and rob him in a lonely spot, eh?' said Hampton in Spanish. "Well, now you can turn around and go back to Panama with us——"

"Hold on, Hampton!" exclaimed Warlock. "It ain't our job, and you know it's plain —— to get tangled up with them dagoes——"

The Indian started suddenly. His eyes fastened on Hampton with a peculiar look; his lean and cavernous features seemed suddenly amazed, astounded.

"Ham-ton!" he exclaimed. "No es possible—no, no! Señor Don Ricardo Hamton——"

"What's that?" exclaimed Hampton. "You know my name——"

"Are you that man, señor?" Excitement blazed suddenly in the brown face. "Are you the brother of my friend—he who wrote a letter——"

"My gosh!" broke from Job Warlock. "It's El Hambre, Dick!"

"*Sí*—El Hambre!" cried the Indian. "Señores, I kiss your hands and feet—we are friends! I have been looking for you a long time, Don Ricardo."

Dick Hampton lowered his revolver, stared amazedly into the suddenly friendly, laughing face of the Indian, and wondered if he were dreaming. What a fashion in which to find El Hambre, the man whom he had come so far to seek!

Then his eyes fell to the dead Chinaman.

II

THE Indian laughed.

This lean, almost cadaverous man whose appearance sufficiently explained his name of "Hunger," uttered a low, harsh and dissonant cackle of sheer mirth. He perfectly comprehended the consternation of the two white men who had apprehended him red-handed in murder—a feeling which Job Warlock expressed disgustedly.

"Durn me if he ain't took us flat aback, matey! And now what?"

Hampton hesitated, then slowly shook his head and put away his weapon. Murderer or no, this Indian was the man he had come so far to seek—and now it was not the fate of his brother alone which hung upon the event, but also that of Nelly Barnes. Reading the message of his gray eyes, El Hambre made a swift gesture, indicating the corpse.

"Señores, you do not know why I have done this? Here, I will show you."

He turned and stooped over the body of the oriental. Ripping asunder the black silk garments, he examined them, searching carefully with deft fingers. A grunt broke from his lips, he brought out his knife, and from the lining of the coat he extracted a letter, well sealed. This he shoved into the hand of Hampton, then darted to the mule, slashed at the thongs binding the load, and showed that this consisted of two stout Mexican trunks, gaily adorned. These he hurled into the jungle, then slapped the mule and sent it off up the trail.

Warlock came to Hampton's side and stared at the letter.

"It's addressed to a New York bank," said Hampton, frowning.

Then, as he turned over the letter, he started slightly. The seal impressed in the red wax was composed of two strange characters—the same two characters graven in the silver haft of the knife that had smitten Jed Barnes so murderously! Hampton looked up, encountered the eyes of El Hambre.

"What's this—a letter from Dias?"

The Indian gave him a slow, astonished look, then nodded.

"Yes, señor. This yellow man was taking it to New York with him; he is a trusted servant of that devil Dias! How did you know?"

Without hesitation, Hampton tore at the letter, forced it open, and found it to contain a number of bank drafts, each payable in New York or San Francisco and endorsed over to James Day. One glance at the names was enough.

"Some of his loot from the Beverly company," said Hampton grimly. "No doubt these men are the ones now in Panama. This money must go back to them—it'll mean everything. What a crafty —— Dias is! El Hambre, is he in Panama now? Can we have him arrested?"

The Indian only laughed at that—the laugh was sufficient answer. He shook his head and began to roll himself another smoke.

Hampton understood clearly enough. Dias was quite immune from any local law, and his victims could not reach him. He had made a rich haul, had undoubtedly gone away in his schooner to his secret hold, and by the time he returned to Panama the city would be flooded with crowds of fresh victims. It was a safe and sure game.

Suddenly, when he had lighted his cigaret, El Hambre came to Hampton and touched his arm.

"You are looking for your brother, Don Ricardo, yes? You want to find this man Dias?"

"I came from the north in the same ship with him, and didn't know it until too late," said Hampton bleakly. "Yes. Now I mean to find him, and my brother too."

"*Bueno!*" The Indian made an imperative gesture. "Then come with me. I am alone, and it is not safe; the men of Dias would kill me if they knew that I was an enemy. We shall hunt that man together, we three. But come quickly, for others are on the trail. We cannot talk here."

He leaned over the body of the yellow man, lifted it without apparent effort, and sent it after the boxes, hidden by the close-crowding jungle. Hampton and Job Warlock got their packs, and the cadaverous Indian beckoned them to the rivulet, which had a good sand bottom. Stepping up the stream, he shoved aside the tangle of vines and creepers, and the others followed him closely for a hundred feet, crouching close to the water and avoiding the heavy mass of foliage overhead. Then, unexpectedly, they emerged into another clearing, and a trail appeared going into the jungle. Job Warlock laughed:

"Injun does it, matey! Now we're goin' to get somewhere, soon's we can swap yarns with this chap. Looks like he's out to stick a knife in Dias, eh? Durned good thing we didn't put a bullet into him for knifing that chink! The world's a fine place, so hurray!"

Hampton made no response, devoting himself to keeping up with El Hambre, who advanced rapidly along the narrow trail that penetrated the jungle. When they had gone half a mile the trail began to mount and the trees thinned out, until at length the three men emerged upon a hillside, close to a trickling waterfall and a thatched hut. El Hambre gave a call, and from the hut emerged a wrinkled Indian woman.

"*Mi madre,*" he said to the white men in explanation. "Señores, my house is yours. Here we can talk in peace, for there is much to say."

The old woman produced food, which neither Hampton nor Warlock desired. After a long drink from the pool under the fall, they lighted their pipes and joined El Hambre in the shade; for Job Warlock, having given up trying to masticate the local tobacco, was compelled to stick to his pipe. After having finished their brief repast, the Indian rolled a smoke and addressed Hampton:

"Don Ricardo, your brother was my very good friend; he was kind to me. I am sorry that I could not help him, yet I am one man and Dias has many men. Three years ago Dias took my wife, because one of his men desired her; since then I have killed his men, and he does not know how they have disappeared. More, I could not do. I am alone, poor, unable to do much. Twice I have tried to kill him—the last time, only a few days ago in Panama. I failed."

"Where is my brother now?" demanded Hampton.

"Across the sea."

"What?"

"*Sí*, señor—across the Vermilion Sea, the Gulf of California—there is a place south of Loreto, in Baja California, where Dias has settled. He takes his slaves there."

"Oh!" said Hampton. "Then you know the place?"

"I went there three years ago, señor," said the Indian simply, "but my wife was dead. I could not stay, lest they discover me and kill me, for I wanted to kill many of them first. So I came back. It was a long way."

"This man, Señor Job, is my friend," and Hampton indicated Warlock. "He comes with me to find my brother—and another. Did you see Dias and the people with him, in Panama?"

"*Sí;* his schooner was there."

"Did you see a señorita with brown hair, who was alone?"

Warlock caught the eye of the Indian and winked significantly, and the brows of El Hambre went up.

"Ah, yes! Yes, señor. She went on his schooner, with others. Some of them he will put ashore at Mazatlan, others he will take home as slaves."

Hampton produced the envelope which had contained the drafts, and pointed to the two mysterious characters on the wax seals.

"What does this writing, if it is writing, mean?"

The Indians shrugged.

"*No sé,* señor! It is a mark, a brand, used by Dias; all his men know it and respect it."

"Perhaps this is the same thing," said Hampton grimly, and produced from beneath his shirt the silver-hilted knife. He indicated the characters graven in the haft.

A gasp broke from the Indian. He leaned forward, took the knife, examined it with awed and incredulous eyes. Then he gazed wolfishly from Hampton to Job Warlock.

"It is the knife of Dias himself," he said.

"Hurray! That settles who is the murderer!" cried Job Warlock, and grinned. "'Little black bull come over the mountain'—Hurray! Now we can go ahead, get the consul to have Dias stowed away in the *calabozo,* and go investigate his joint up the coast!"

"Not so fast—explain the matter first."

Between them they sketched for El Hambre what had taken place aboard the *Hannah,* and how they had been providentially picked up by the French ship. The lean Indian listened, his eyes flashing, a keen intelligence evident in his features. He was by no means handsome, since his face was scarred and pitted by smallpox, but both men warmed to him.

"Now," concluded Hampton, "here is what must be done. We must go to Panama and return the money that Dias stole from those men, and you must tell them whose knife this is——"

El Hambre intervened.

"A moment, señor! It is impossible to go to Panama."

"Why impossible?" demanded Hampton, reading much behind the words.

The Indian laughed in his harsh, chuckling way.

"I was there last night, bargaining with that yellow man to bring him to Chagres, that I might kill him; unluckily, there was another yellow man——"

"Another?" struck in Hampton. "Another Chinaman?"

"Dias is served by many of them," explained the Indian. "Most of the yellow men are his friends; why, I do not know. Yes, there was another. I wanted to make sure of him also, and last night I followed him to the place, where he lived, in the street of the shoemakers. There was a *baile* in that street, and just as I was killing the yellow man, a fight arose between Americanos and police; so it happened that, as I was leaving the house, police seized me as a thief. They let me go when they recognized me, for it is known that I am no thief; but when they find the dead yellow man this morning, they will search for me. They may be searching now—*quién sabe?* If I go to Panama, they will take me."

Hampton marveled at the cool and imperturbable manner in which this man spoke of his killings. It was unreal and ghastly, almost inhuman; nothing could have so bitterly emphasized the Indian's ferocious and deadly hatred of Dias as his matter-of-fact recital. Under the circumstances, it was of course impossible for El Hambre to venture into the city by day.

On the other hand, Hampton was resolved to get the murder of Jed Barnes cleared up and thus procure his own absolution from the crime. The opportunity which was now his might never come again, and he was savagely determined not to lose the providential chance. Yet, for a moment, he could find no way out of the impasse. Upon the silence rose the voice of Job Warlock, humming his interminable ditty:

"A little black bull came down from the mountain,
  Ri tura lingtum, ri tura lay!
A little black bull came down from the mountain,
  Ri tura lingtum, diddle diddle aye!

"Oh, the little black bull he was feeling frisky,
  Ri tura lingtum, ri——"

Hampton cut short the chant.

"What sort of place is the stronghold of Dias?"

"Puerto Escondido? As the name says, señor don, it is a little hidden haven, inside a barren and rocky island. All around the haven is ancient desert. There is a long, deep valley with a rivulet, and a tiny harbor. Dias has ships which prey on the pearl fisheries or come down to these coasts and do other things."

"A pirate haven?"

"By no means, señor; his two schooners hold the direct commission of Santa Ana."

"How can we get there from Panama? Are you willing to go with us?"

El Hambre grinned.

"*Sí, sí*, señor! I go gladly. But to go is another matter—it is not a trip to make in a fishing boat. There is a schooner in port now, a Mexican schooner bound north to Acapulco and Mazatlan. Her captain hates all *gringos* and will take no passengers; but if he thinks you are wealthy Basques or Cubans who can pay, and me your servant, he will agree. He is to sail tomorrow night or the next day. Still, it is not a boat with a good reputation, señor."

Job Warlock chuckled, reading what was in Hampton's thought.

"Looks like the beards stay, matey! The world's a good place, so hurray!"

Hampton ignored him. "Very well, we go by that boat, El Hambre, if it can be managed. From Mazatlan we can get across the gulf easily enough. Now, have you any idea where we can find the *Americanos* from whom Dias stole this money?"

The Indian, who was now aglow with eagerness, shrugged.

"*Dios sabe*, señor! They are camped along the bay by the hundreds; already the hotels are crowded to the doors. One must search."

"Well, then, we shall search. Can we reach Panama without going by the main road?"

"Yes; by trail to the plantation Mendoza y Mueges, then by road to the city."

"Then I suggest this," said Hampton decisively. "You lead us there first thing in the morning, and leave us. We've both been in Panama before, and know our way around. Then, after dark tomorrow night, you come along and join us. When my business is settled, we can see that Mexican skipper. Are you afraid to enter the city after dark?"

El Hambre shrugged.

"I will risk it, señores; besides, I can enter even if the gates are shut. I will do it, because we are *amigos*—but," and here he looked at Hampton in a singular manner, "there is something you do not yet know."

"There's a good deal I don't know, but I mean to find out," and Hampton laughed. "Well?"

El Hambre began to fabricate a smoke, with meticulous care. He did not reply until he had scratched a sulphur-match and was puffing gently. A strange expression lay in the regard that he fastened upon the two white men.

"Yesterday," he said, "a schooner arrived in Panama, landed a passenger, and went on to the south. It was one of the schooners belonging to Dias—he has two. Evidently that passenger came to meet Dias and did not know he had already arrived and gone north by his other schooner. That passenger is still in Panama City."

"Well, what of it?" asked Hampton. "Who's the passenger?"

"A very beautiful woman," said El Hambre, and smiled thinly. "A most beautiful and cruel woman, señores, with the heart of a *tigre*. It is said that her father was a wealthy merchant of Manila, and her mother a yellow woman—no one knows. It is through her that Dias is served by the yellow men—that is, they serve her, and hence serve him. That woman is more dangerous than many men."

"And she is——"

"Señora Dias." The Indian spat in the sand. "Or, as men call her, Doña Hermana."

"Doña Hermana?" Job Warlock scowled puzzled. "That is no woman's name. It means sister."

"*Sí*," and El Hambre showed his white teeth in a flashing smile. "Doña Hermana del Diablo—Sister of the Devil."

"Oh!" said Hampton thoughtfully, and fell silent. He remembered what his brother had written about this woman, and wondered if poor Eli were now slaving away to build a palace in Baja California for the wife of Dias.

"Well," he added presently, "we have nothing to do with her."

"But," said El Hambre, "she is in Panama, and she is a terrible woman. I am afraid of her, Señor Ricardo, and that is one very good reason why we should not go there."

Hampton looked at the man, met the glittering eyes, and his lips set ominously. Then, after a moment, he spoke——

"We are going."

"*Bueno.*" The Indian shrugged and smiled. "*Yo también.*"

"And I also," repeated Job Warlock, grinning. "All three together, and —— the odds! Eh, matey! But I think that, instead of finishing our job, we have only begun it!"

El Hambre, who was still fingering that knife with the silver haft, ran his thumb along the razor-keen blade.

"I would give much for a knife such as this," he murmured.

"Keep it," said Hampton indifferently, "but be sure to bring it to the city with you tomorrow night!"

The Indian uttered his harsh laugh. "Good! Good!" he exclaimed. "There will be men with the Doña Hermana. Yellow men!"

Job Warlock grinned understandingly, but Hampton was slow to catch the implication.

III

HAVING made a start with dawn, three hours of hard travel by jungle and hill trails saw the three companions within five miles of Panama City. Passing the Mendoza y Mueges hacienda, they emerged upon a very fair carriage road which, as El Hambre informed the other two, joined the Chagres-Panama highway two miles from the latter city, and which would be practically deserted. The hour was too late for peons to be going to town with produce, and too early for the average city dweller to be outward bound.

"Here I leave you, señores," said the Indian gravely. "Where do we meet tonight?"

"That is for you to say," returned Hampton.

"Very well. Go to the inn of the Golden Pomegranates, in the Calle de los Hermanos, and ask for the owner, Juan d'Aquila. He is my father's brother; say that you come from me. I'll meet you there at nine tonight."

"Agreed," said Hampton. "*Hasta la noche!*"

"Until tonight," repeated El Hambre, and was gone among the green foliage.

Hampton and Warlock struck out together along the road, which wound apparently through open jungle, though at times patches of cleared and cultivated land appeared beyond the bordering trees and vines, and twice they passed imposing haciendas. They had evidently been brought into one of the fertile vales which supplied the ancient richness of Panama.

"Looks to me," observed Warlock, "as if we'd better raise an army before we go after Dias! Either that or a navy. What's your idea, anyhow?"

"You and I and El Hambre can do more than any army," responded Hampton. "All three of us together and —— the odds! Hello—squally weather ahead——"

From a bend in the road just ahead, masked by trees, rose a shrill yell, followed by the roar of a gun. Then, almost upon them, dashed into sight a carriage drawn by two plunging horses. Another shot smashed out, and one of the horses pitched forward, bringing down the second and flinging a groom to the road, where he lay senseless. In the halted carriage appeared a woman, whose bright gown and gay parasol made a brilliant splotch of color.

As the two men stood staring, a group of figures broke into sight, running at the carriage; there was a flash of knives, and a yell shrilled up.

"Hold-up," exclaimed Job Warlock, snatching at his revolver.

Hampton's weapon was already out, and he fired twice. The carriage was not twenty feet distant; the bandits, half a dozen ragged peons, were checked by the sight of two strangers, and one of them fell to Hampton's shots. An *escopeta* roared, and the slugs whistled overhead, as Warlock's weapon cracked—but instead of breaking, the bandits yelled and leaped forward, thinking that they had to deal with pistols now discharged and empty.

When Hampton dropped the leader, and Warlock winged another, cries of dismay burst from the remaining men, and next instant they scattered and were gone into the jungle, leaving a wounded comrade to drag himself after them, and two bodies sprawled grotesquely in the sunlit road. Warlock sprang to the reins of the unhurt horse, which was on his feet plunging in mad fright, while Hampton, removing his wide hat, turned to the occupant of the carriage.

Somewhat to his astonishment, he perceived that not only was she quite composed, but was smiling at him in entire absence of fright or alarm. Also, he noted that she was a rarely beautiful woman, with darkly vivid Spanish coloring and a peculiar golden glow to her skin which might have come from the sunlight splashing through the interstices of her dropping Leghorn hat. Jewels flashed on her fingers.

"*Muchas gracias*, señores!" she exclaimed, not in the long Mexican drawl but in the more precise and lisping accents of Castile. "I owe you more than thanks; I am in your debt. Those bandits shot one groom and the other went down when my horse was killed—you are not hurt? Praise to the saints!"

Hampton bowed, not forgetting that he must play a part.

"Señora, the opportunity of serving you is its own reward. With your leave, I will help my friend revive your groom——"

He rushed to the aid of Warlock, who had quieted the horse, and between them they got the stunned groom revived and on his feet. The latter, his fears appeased, looked at the dead bandit leader, and crossed himself.

"It is he, El Tigre, the dreaded outlaw. But who will pay for my horse——"

"I will pay, fool," came the woman's voice, with an authoritative ring in it. "Go and see whether your companion is alive—though I think he was shot in the head and done for. Then return and hitch up the remaining horse. Señores, to whom do I give my thanks? Are you travelers, as your appearance would indicate, or paladin knights sent by the saints to aid me?"

Job Warlock, bowing, grinned widely and made answer.

"Neither and both, señora. Being Basque, we are noble, since every Basque gentleman is a noble by ancient rights; and having tired of plantations in Cuba, which we have sold, we are now traveling to the land of Eldorado, to seek California gold. I am Hernan d'Etchevain, and my friend here is Antonio Estramure. Señora, we kiss your hands and feet."

To all this stately Spanish speech the woman paid little heed, save to one word, for her eyes were devouring the two men. Hampton found those dark and liquid eyes unaccountably piercing, and behind their beauty was a poise and quiet control unusual in such a woman.

"Basque!" she repeated. "That explains the accent, and also the swift action. Señores, since you are bound for California, it happens that I may be of aid to you. Come to my house at five this afternoon—the House of Yellow Tiles, in the Calle de los Hermanos."

Hampton bowed assent, and at this instant the groom returned, with word that his fellow was dead. Hampton and Warlock helped him get the remaining horse patched up with the harness, and in another five minutes the carraige moved away toward town, with a last farewell from the unknown lady. When the equipage had disappeared, Warlock dug his friend in the ribs.

"Ha! 'Little black bull came over the mountain'—did ye note the hit ye made, Dick? She has an eye for wide shoulders, eh? I'll bet she'd like to see ye show up without me! And no name mentioned, neither—she's some fine lady. Look out ye don't get a knife from her husband tonight. A knife's a poor dinner, as the Injun said when he rubbed his belly——"

"Shut up," said Hampton, but frowned as he spoke. "There's something about her what I don't fancy."

"Then I'll keep the appointment, and glad to leave ye behind!" Warlock chuckled. "Let's be moving, for we have work to do. Aye, her house is in the same street with the inn—you stop behind, and I'll go meet the lady, right enough!"

"We've other things on hand than playing fast and loose in Panama City."

"Aye, but she can help us get north! That's a shot in your locker, matey."

Hampton returned no answer, but struck into a rapid stride. He was not so pleased with the adventure as might have been; beautiful as the woman was, something in her face chilled and startled him; he could not forget the singular poise of those dark eyes.

However, he made no comment as they continued their brisk pace, and Job did not again break in upon his silence. Suddenly the road which they were following made an abrupt turn, and then emerged without warning upon the highway, two miles from the city—a wide road here paved with cobbles, chain gangs of convicts at work installing the stones farther on. The towers of the cathedral glistened in the sunlight, and to right and left were handsome suburban residences and gardens, the morning air sweet with the scent of flowers and oranges.

Another mile, and they came to the huge arching span of the stone bridge, and went on past the tower to where the road narrowed between walls to the moat and gate, where barefoot soldiers, clad in dirty white, uniform caps of blue and red, sustained the dignity of the sovereign republic of New Granada. The gates were open and the soldiers more interested in dice than in entrants, however, and no question was asked as the two friends passed through to the narrow streets of the city.

Here the tremendous influx of foreign elements was at once evident. There seemed to be only a sprinkling of little brown men, most of them barefoot, and native women cloaked in *rebosos;* everywhere were foreigners, with Americans predominating. The majority of these were swaggering about, enjoying themselves and spending money in great style; but from comments he caught in passing, and a few emaciated skeletons whom he observed, Hampton concluded that the camp on the beach would tell a different story. Neither he nor Warlock saw any one whom they knew, and having first to find the Inn of the Golden Pomegranates, directed their inquiries to this end.

The Street of the Brothers proved to be a tortuous and narrow lane behind the plaza, and not far from the ramparts where the brazen Spanish cannon glittered in the sunlight. Passing down this lane, the two men came presently to their objective—a small and unpromising fonda which was obviously given over to the peon trade, with numbers of Indians and mestizos sprawling about. Finding himself confronted by a wrinkled little old man, Hampton asked for Juan d'Aquila.

"I am he, señores," said the other, with a scrape, and a half-scowl.

"We are from El Hambre."

Instantly the demeanor of their host passed from suspicion into hurried affability. He conducted them to a door, which led into a passage, and so into a very clean room with pink-painted ceiling and enormous netted bed. Relieving them of their packs, d'Aquila set out chairs and bowed.

"Señores, my house is yours, and all in it. Shall I bring food and wine before talking?"

It was by this time noon, and Hampton assented gladly. D'Aquila left, speedily to return with cakes, fruit and wine. Then, while they ate, he rolled cigaritos for them and talked. He was a little, gentle old Indian, full of wisdom.

"You are from that nephew of mine, an therefore it is a matter for discretion," he said smilingly. "I suppose he knows that the police are seeking him?"

Hampton nodded. "Yes, but he is to meet us here at nine tonight. Can you supply us with a room that will be private?"

"This is my own room; it is yours."

"Good. We shall return here, and tonight two or three men may come asking for us, at nine o'clock. They will ask for me, Don Ricardo; admit them, for they are friends. That is all."

"Except," said Warlock, "to tell us where there is a house in this street called the House of Yellow Tiles. Who lives there?"

D'Aquila shrugged:

"It is an old house at the farther end of the street, señores, and once belonged to the family of Guzman; now it is rented to no one knows whom—a family from down the coast, some say. They are rarely seen, and are not here often, though I heard today that the house was open."

Disappointed in this, Hampton rose, for he meant to waste no time getting in touch with some of the Beverly company men; so, bidding d'Aquila *adios,* he returned to the street with Job Warlock, and they began to make inquiries from the obvious Americans sauntering past.

They discovered that their search must depend upon luck alone. The various companies reaching Panama tried to keep together, but it was impossible. The hotels were crowded, rooms of all sorts were at a high premium, and hundreds of men were camped out along the beach, while those who could afford to do so had gone over to Tobago Island to get out of the Panama fever-zone. The two friends consulted, and decided to separate.

"We've no time to lose, and one of us will be sure to get results," said Job Warlock. "Whichever one of us finds the crowd, tell 'em to be at the inn at nine—that right? Then, where will you and me meet up?"

"At the inn, or failing that, at the señora's house at five."

Warlock grinned.

"Ain't going to give me a show alone, eh? All right. So long."

So they parted, at the plaza, each going in a different direction along the crowded streets.

Hampton, bound in the general direction of the beach, could not miss the uproarious spirit of those around him; for here about the plaza centered the cockpits and gambling halls, where monte was the chief diversion, and the *pulquerias* where every kind of drink from Peruvian pisco to Irish whisky could be obtained. For the gold-seekers there was no siesta hour, yet Hampton observed that the Americans in general, and above all the New Englanders, were under far greater restraint than the Europeans. Everywhere whanged out "Susannah," from voice, accordion, violin or banjo; the swinging lilt of that air, which could be plaintive or roaring according to the tempo, filled everything.

"If it's like this at noon, what is it at night?" said Hampton to a Yankee standing in the street industriously chewing tobacco.

"Plain —— at night, pardner," was the response, "with them niggers keepin' knives sharp."

"I suppose you don't happen to know where I could find a Beverly company I'm looking for?"

"Them Beverly men? Sure—the poor —— are camped down to the beach, just the other side them fishing shacks. Half of them down with plague or fever, I hear tell."

Hampton turned away and started for the bay, keeping time to "Susannah" as a party of bearded Hamburg men roared it out to German words of their own. That was practically the only tune heard in Panama, even when the military band played in the plaza; there was something in its lilt, in its sharply accented rhythm, which captivated the fancy of men.

When he was nearing the beach, along a hot and deserted little street with overhanging balconies and closed shutters, Hampton descried a figure approaching him with staggering step. This gaunt, emaciated creature, with ragged beard and tatterdemalion garments, he knew at once for an American, and eyed the man with pity. Then, upon drawing closer, dim recognition of those disease-smitten features leaped within him, and he halted staring; abruptly, with a gasp, he realized that this reeling scarecrow was the erstwhile dapper Adam Johnson, secretary of the Beverly company! Johnson came closer, fastened haggard eyes on Hampton, and came to a halt.

"You!" he croaked. "No, it can't be you, Dick Hampton—it can't be you——"

Hampton sprang forward and caught the man as he reeled.

"Dick Hampton it is, old fellow—here, brace up! You're sick!"

"Sick and starved." A hollow groan burst from Adam Johnson. "Nickerson died yesterday—he stayed with us. The other officers went with that scoundrel James Day. We're flat broke. No money, nothing except what we can beg—dysentery, fever——"

"Thank God, man, I found you!" exclaimed Hampton fervently. "Coming across from Chagres I intercepted a message from Day. It contained a lot of your money—he was sending it to be cashed in New York. Here, look at these——"

He produced the drafts, and Adam Johnson looked at them with distended eyes, then put his face in his hands and cried like a child. Hampton drew him into the shade of a doorway.

"You can't know what this means to us, all," gasped Johnson at length. "Thirty of us were here; ten are dead. Three more won't last until tomorrow. But now we can get food, everything! A lot of the other men have helped us, but most of them don't care. Now we can get back home—man, this is too good to be true! Thank the good Lord for you, Dick Hampton."

Hampton took Johnson's arm and turned back toward the plaza.

"Here, I have ready money," he said quietly. "While you're getting one of those drafts cashed, if you can do so, I'll be buying up some stuff and engaging a carrier. We'd better take a load down to camp. And tonight I'll be able to give you proof, Johnson, that I was innocent of the murder of Jed Barnes. Dias was the guilty man—James Day."

"I don't doubt it now," said the other bitterly. "After the way he robbed us all, we'll believe anything of the scoundrel. And, Hampton! Nelly Barnes must have gone on the schooner with him and our officers. Ezra Howe and his wife were to look after her——"

"Never mind; I know," said Hampton. "Come along, now. We've work to do."

There was no difficulty in getting some of the drafts cashed, as many a man had more ready cash than he needed and was glad to convert some of it into less dangerous paper; moreover, Adam Johnson was a man well known to others from Boston or near-by parts. So, in half an hour's time, the two approached the terrible waterfront, with two staggering peon carriers behind them, and others on the way.

The scene along the beach, where each morning a dozen or two bodies were washed out to the sharks, beggared description; the Beverly men were no worse off than other parties. With food, drink, medicines, Dick Hampton and others who were sound fell to work among the sick, injected some atoms of order and decency into the miserable shelters of blankets and old garments, and finally moved the entire company to a spot farther down the beach where the sand was at least a trifle cleaner. The gratitude of the destitute men to Hampton was pitiful, for scarce one of them but had obtained a portion of his money back.

This work of mercy took time, however—most of the afternoon, in fact, and there was no sign of Job Warlock on the scene, so that Hampton had the chief burden on his own shoulders. One or two men from other companies pitched in and gave a hand, but the majority only marveled. The shouts of joy from the Beverly men, their devout prayers of thanksgiving, had attracted attention, and the news of their retrieved fortunes had been swift to spread abroad through the multitude.

Hampton was far from suspecting any danger from this fact; he had no time to think of anything until the camp was in shape. Then, in a drip of perspiration and feeling nearly exhausted, he joined Adam Johnson over a pipe and a bottle of wine. It was nearly four o'clock, and he had little enough time to get clean clothes, return to the inn and bathe, and keep his appointment with the unknown señora. Still, it was necessary to confide in Johnson to a certain extent, and he did so, but found that Johnson could give him no further information.

"Say the word," said Johnson, "and we'll all join you in following that rascal Day!"

"No, thanks," returned Hampton bluntly. He could not explain that these retired farmers and New England merchants were not the type of men to go on such a quest. "What you can do is to have three or four men with you at the Inn of the Golden Pomegranates at nine sharp tonight. I want you to be able to take word home that I'm innocent of murdering Jed Barnes"

"We'll do it, and gladly," affirmed Johnson. "We'll send off letters tomorrow, to make certain, and will carry the word ourselves. We're all going back home, I think, as fast as we're able to travel."

Hampton looked across the sand, attracted by a sudden motion. A peon had been talking with a group of the Beverly men, and now rose and departed. Moved by a sudden impulse, Hampton hailed the men.

"What was that fellow after, boys? Look out for thieves, now!"

"You bet," came the response. "He'd heard about your finding our money, and was just asking who you were."

Hampton sprang to his feet, but the peon had disappeared.

"Anything wrong?" demanded Adams Johnson.

"No," said Hampton slowly. "No. I'll have to be moving, though. See you tonight, sure!"

"Nine sharp."

Hampton returned to the plaza thoughtfully. It seemed hardly likely that Dias should have left men to look out for him and Job Warlock—that they should ever reach Panama must have appeared improbable; yet ever since their rescue they had been anticipating some such possibility. Dias had too much at stake to take chances. If that peon had been a spy of Dias, then the fat might be in the fire—or it might not.

Returning to the inn with a bundle of clean clothes, he went to the room d'Aquila had put at his disposal. Job Warlock had not returned. Hampton trimmed his half-grown beard, washed and dressed, and slightly before five o'clock started down the street toward the House of Yellow Tiles. All in all, he felt highly satisfied with his afternoon's work.

The house in question, one of the many half-ruined structures which filled the old city, was pointed out to him, and as he approached, he sighted the figure of Warlock coming toward him.

"Where've you been all afternoon?" demanded Hampton.

Warlock grinned, and opened his hand to display a mass of gold coins.

"Playing monte—and winning. Likewise, I been playing with that Mex skipper the Injun told us about. Filled him full o' lies, and we can have passage if we want. His schooner leaves in the morning. Have any luck? All spruced up for the lady, ain't you?"

"Found Adam Johnson; everything's settled. Here's our house."

They paused before an archway, which gave access to an old carven black-oak door. Job Warlock pulled the hand bell, and Hampton let the heavy knocker fall—then he found the hand of Warlock gripping his arm.

"Look there!" exclaimed Job, pointing, a sudden glitter in his eyes, and Hampton turned to look at the stone beside the doorway, on the inside of the arch. There, painted in blue on the stone, were the two characters which had appeared on the knife and seal of Dias.

"Good gosh, matey!" breathed Job Warlock softly. "Know what this is? Now we're up against it and no mistake—that there señora was Doña Hermana herself—the wife o' Dias!"

The door before them opened, and Hampton swung about to face a Chinaman.

IV

"YOU are expected, señores," said the yellow man in bad Spanish.

"Say quick!" snapped Job Warlock in English. "In or out, matey?"

"In," said Hampton, stepping forward. There suddenly came to him the realization that if this woman really were Doña Hermana, she could of course assist them on their way—not to Upper California, but to Lower California. If she could be wheedled into assisting them, so much the better.

Then, while he stood beside Warlock in the hall for a moment, as the Chinaman took their hats before leading them on into the *patio*, Hampton could have groaned aloud. The woman took them for Basques; but if his suspicions were correct, Dias' spies already knew their true names—or that of Hampton, at least. Perhaps, after all, Dias had taken for granted that they would never reach Panama; yet he was not a man to take things for granted. Hampton gripped Job Warlock's shoulder, as they crossed the threshold.

"I've mixed things horribly, Job," he said quietly. "Careful, now!"

"Injun does it," said Warlock cheerfully, not understanding yet accepting the words. Then they were following the yellow man into a hidden but magnificent *patio*, sweet with the spray of a large fountain, the air heavy with flower scents, orange trees and blooming beds all around.

The Chinaman led to an awning spread near the fountain, where Doña Hermana awaited them. Now she was clad in a shimmering brocade of dark-blue shot with silver, which richly accentuated her startling beauty, and enhanced the slight oriental effect of her features. Yet for all her beauty, for all the smiling warmth of her greeting, Hampton could not feel that he was dealing with a woman, as he knew women; in her seemed no depth of emotion, and the liquid tenderness of her eyes rang false, though her welcome appeared sincere enough.

"So my paladins could leave the delights of Panama to come and see a poor woman!" she exclaimed, holding out her hands to them. "Señores, I am honored; this house is yours."

"Señora, my friend here has been moving all day in a dream," put in Warlock slyly. "He has talked only of you—by the saints, each hour has been a century for him! I do not know whether he more desires to proceed to California, or to stay in Panama!"

At this audacious speech, Hampton flung his friend one angry glance, but the señora laughed merrily and directed the full battery of her eyes on Hampton.

"Well, señor, has your desire for California in truth grown so weak?"

"Not at all," responded Hampton, resigning himself. "But what is there in California except gold?"

"That was a much nicer compliment, señor," she returned, and for a moment Hampton read singular and disquieting things in her eyes. "I like you both, my bold Basques! Here, sit by me and I shall roll you something to smoke, and you shall taste my sherbets while we talk."

They seated themselves, and two native women appeared, placing sherbet and cakes on the table and supplying the señor with smoking materials. When she had deftly rolled *cigaritos* from tobacco and the fine thin paper that the *ricos* used, she struck a sulphur match, lighted her own first, in the courteous Mexican fashion, and then when the sulphur had burned off held out the match to Hampton.

"Now tell me of your affairs," she said, watching the two, although her eyes rested more upon Hampton than on Warlock. "How did you happen to be on the road this morning?"

"We were lost, coming across from Chagres, and followed jungle trails," said Hampton.

"You have money? You have arranged for a passage north, perhaps?"

"Money, yes, but money will not buy a passage north," returned Hampton. "A ship from Callao is expected next week, every berth is sold, and a bonus of five hundred dollars is being offered without a taker. We have no hope of getting a passage for some months."

The señora smiled.

"Then I can in some slight measure repay your service, señores! My husband's schooner is now down among the islands, and will return here in a week, to carry me north to Mazatlan. May I offer you a passage to that port? There I can help you arrange for a passage to San Francisco, or my husband can do so. Would this suit you?"

Her gaze dwelt upon Hampton's face, and he endeavored to assume a joy that he was far from feeling. It was ridiculous to think that this woman was deliberately flirting with him, yet he read curious things in those dark and liquid eyes.

"Señora, the thought of that voyage in your company overpowers me with happiness!" he made answer, and thanked her with the stately Spanish phrases that could mean so much or so little. He was uncomfortably conscious of Job Warlock's grin.

"*Bueno*. Then it is arranged," and the lady waved her *cigarito* grandly. "Come, tell me about yourselves and your adventures in Cuba! Every one knows that Basques are adventurers and men of great deeds——"

"But, señora," protested Hampton, "we do not yet know whose hospitality we are so happily enjoying!"

The señora opened her dark eyes.

"What! Have I not told you that my husband is the merchant Juan Avilar y Sortes of Mazatlan, and that I am Inez de Sortes? You must pardon my omission, then, señores! Come, what of yourselves?"

Hampton made haste to forestall his companion in replying. Now that he definitely knew the lady for a liar—he was convinced that she was the wife of Dias—he did not hesitate to deliver a bold stroke. In any case, she would know soon enough that he was not what he represented himself, but an American; and if Dias had left any word of Hampton, she would quickly know him for whom he was. Perhaps before the night was out.

"There is little to tell, señora," he replied swiftly, building on the lady's evident failure to meet her husband here. "We obtained passage to Chagres from the Havana with a most charming gentleman, a North American, whom we expected to meet here, but so far we have not found him. He came ahead of us from Chagres, you understand."

"His name?" she murmured. "Perhaps I could help you in the search."

"His name," said Hampton, while Warlock gave him an oblique glance, "was Señor Day—James or Diego Day. You have heard of him, yes?"

By the brief narrowing of her lids he knew the shot had driven home. She only picked up a fan, however, and began to move it lazily.

"I regret not to have heard of him, señor," she said. "I shall have inquiries made."

"That will be most kind," said Hampton earnestly. "This Señor Day must certainly be in the city; had we not become lost in the mountains for several days, we should have met him, though by now he may have gone to Tobago Island. He was much enamored of a lady aboard the ship, and has perhaps taken her to the island to await a north-bound vessel."

Now was reward, certain and prompt, for the eyes of the lady flashed with a sudden and fierce glint, as the eyes of an angered tigress, and her long fingers checked the fan for an instant. Then it passed, but Hampton knew that he had scored a hit. Job Warlock by his silence betrayed his perplexity, so Hampton swiftly ordered him to tell the señora of their adventures, and Job wakened into action. He had a seaman's gift for using his imagination, and now he used it to a remarkable extent.

The lady listened to the recital with only perfunctory attention, however, lazily using her fan and watching Hampton rather than Warlock. The brain behind those dark eyes was busy, and Hampton, realizing the fact, was only too glad to seize the first opportunity of rising and taking leave.

"We promised to be at the Astor House by dark, and it is nearly sunset now," he said. "We have arranged to get a room there, or else at a small tavern in this same street; so we must be on hand to secure it. Also, we must look for news of Señor Day."

The señora did not protest, and rose to say farewell first to Job Warlock, smiling into his eyes as she did so. Then she struck a gong on the table, and the Chinese servant who had admitted them made his appearance.

"Señor," she said to Job, "you expressed your admiration of my tobacco—I shall have this servant give you a packet of it, with my compliments. I trust that I shall see you very shortly; perhaps at the comandante's grand *baile* on Sunday night, for which I shall secure you invitations. *Hasta la vista!*"

Warlock, finding himself dismissed, winked over the lady's shoulder and moved toward the *patio* entrance. The señora turned swiftly to Hampton, as the latter bowed over her hand, and clutched his fingers. He felt something shoved into his palm.

"Here, señor! Take this, and in time of trouble it may be of use to you. Preserve it carefully; you will find that I am not ungrateful to my gallant Basque adventurer! You will return—when? Tomorrow evening when the moon rises?"

"Señor, if I am in this city tomorrow evening," responded Hampton, forcing a smile to meet those disquieting eyes, "the power of Señor Diablo himself shall not keep me from looking into your eyes! *Hasta la vista.*"

"*Hasta la noche,*" corrected the señora, and smiled after him as he departed.

Five minutes afterward, the carven doors closed behind the two friends, and they were in the almost empty street, the heavens above and the ancient stone walls and houses tinctured with the red glare of sunset. Hampton wiped sweat from his brow.

"I said it," observed Job Warlock whimsically. "These Spanish girls all look twice at a fair-haired señor whose gray eyes——"

Hampton's fingers closed on his arm.

"Stop it! Job, you have plenty of money? Then get off in a hurry and find that Mex skipper of yours; tell him we're in danger of our lives from Americans—any story you like. The point is, we must get out of here at the earliest possible moment. Bribe him to sail at dawn, if you can."

"But—" began the staring Warlock. Hampton checked him energetically.

"No time to talk now; explain later. Arrange for ourselves and our Indian servant, and do it at any cost, savvy? If we're here tomorrow, we'll catch it hot and heavy. Get along with you, now, and back to the inn on the jump. I'll have dinner waiting for you."

Comprehending that some urgency threatened, Warlock paused not for more argument, but departed at a run. Hampton, drawing a deep breath, started more calmly for the inn.

"That was a stiff job, and a mighty mean one!" he reflected uncomfortably. "But she asked for it, and she got it. How far she meant well, heaven only knows, and I'm sure no judge—she lied like a good one, though, and if I can get her started on the trail of her precious spouse, so much the better. All's fair in war. Just the same, I want to be out of town when she wakes up to the truth."

Feeling the lady's parting gift in his sweating palm, he looked at the object. This proved to be a small flat tablet of ivory or bone, in which a gold ring was inserted for suspension by a cord. Upon the tablet were incised those same two characters which Dias used as a seal or brand, and the incisions were filled with blue paint.

Hampton was swift to comprehend that this was a token which would be recognized by any of Dias' men; the señora had not spoken falsely in describing its potential value. He thrust it into a pocket and turned in at the tavern entrance. D'Aquila, wrinkled and gentle, met and led him through a crowd of peons to the passage, and in a few words Hampton arranged to have dinner served in their private room in an hour's time.

Alone, he stretched out, lighted his pipe, and rather gloomily reviewed the events of the afternoon. He was beginning to feel afraid of Doña Hermana; he felt more afraid of her in kindness than in anger. This, in fact, was one reason for his words to her. He felt very certain that within a few hours she would know much of all of the truth about him, and he desired to leave her in no doubt of his own position.

His pipe was not yet finished when Job came into the room, shut the door, and then dropped into a chair.

"Done it! Found him still at monte and in a run of bad luck," Warlock announced without preamble. "He's agreed to sail at dawn, and will have a boat waiting for us then; we're to flash a light twice on the beach. Passage to Mazatlan will cost us two hundred each. I paid him half down, and it cleaned me out. Lord help us if he discovers that we're Americans and not Basques! He hates gringos like poison. Well, matey, what's the good word?"

Hampton knocked out his pipe, and recounted his experiences of the afternoon. When he told about the inquiring peon, Warlock let out a whistle.

"'Little black bull came over the mountain'—oh, I savvy plenty, Dick! Old Dias left word to look out for us if we ever did show up, and you can gamble on it. But why tell the señora all that stuff?"

"If the peon was a spy, won't he report to her—probably this evening?" countered Hampton. "Job, there's only one word to apply to the lady; she's plumb bad! She'll find soon enough that we've skipped town —then what?"

"—— to pay, I reckon."

"Sure; but we'll be heading north and she'll be laid up here until her schooner comes back in a week. Meantime, she'll be boiling about her precious husband. Also, the chances are she'll know that we've started north, and she'll drop in an Acapulco and Mazatlan to look us up. All in all, she'll waste a lot of time before she gets home, and we'll have a chance to work at Dias. I don't mind saying that I'd like to leave her out of the scrap; at the same time, I'd sooner have her enmity than her friendship."

Warlock grinned at this.

"Injun does it, matey! You played her, all right—and I don't know as I blame you for being scared of her. She has her eye on you, right enough. Still, that tobacco was pretty good stuff. What was it she slipped into your hand during that affectionate *adios* you exchanged?"

Hampton grunted disgustedly, and produced the bone tablet. Warlock examined it, and frowned over the characters.

"I'd like to know what this writing means! Well, take care of the thing; we may need it yet. Now, see here—what about guns? We can't get any more ammunition for these durned French revolvers; but if we look sharp, we can rustle up some real American style pistols and rifles tonight. The town's full of would-be Injun hunters, and there's plenty of men will be glad to cash in on the guns they can't use. Guns ain't grub, as the Injun said when he rubbed his belly."

"Good idea," approved Hampton, and got out his money-belt. "Suppose you attend to it right after dinner, will you? Here's enough money to see you through; we'll reach Mazatlan with a slim purse, but I think we'll scrape along all right. Here's dinner now."

Their host entered, himself bearing the meal Hampton had ordered, and the two friends discussed a simple but excellent dinner. When he had finished, Job Warlock girded up his loins and departed on his errand. Hampton, finding himself with half an hour to spare, donned his hat and went out in search of a razor, for he was determined to be rid of his beard before the next sun.

He sauntered up toward the plaza, and found the gay night life of Panama in full blast—the streets thronged with natives and gold-hunters, music-halls and drink-shops riotous with loud voices, palaces of chance crowded to the doors with seekers after sudden wealth at dice or cards. Guitars thrummed and voices thundered "Susannah" with every known variation, for here were the men with money to spend, the still eager and hopeful ones—that horrible camp near the beach was far from this bright scene. Hampton saw nothing of his French friends, who had probably not yet arrived from Gorgona.

He wandered on, and behind the cathedral found a shop where he purchased a razor and other toilet articles. Then, retracing his steps toward the plaza, he came to the squalid little tavern known as the Astor House, and was passing it when he caught a sudden shrill shout from close at hand. He halted, and the next moment found a dozen little brown soldiers all around him, rifles up and an officer pushing to the front.

And, beside the officer, pointing him out eagerly, was the peon whom he had noticed in the camp that afternoon—the spy of Dias.

V

TOO slow to waken to his danger, Hampton perceived that he was surrounded beyond hope of escape. There was no local ill-feeling against Americans, for Panama was too far from Mexico to share in the hatred engendered by the late war; but the brown soldiers took no chances in dealing with their brawny transients, and the steadiness of the rifles around him apprized Hampton that he could not attempt to break clear.

"It is he, señor capitan!" cried the peon to the officer, pointing to Hampton. "That is the *gringo*, the very one! It was he who robbed and murdered my brother, coming from Chagres! Warn your men to be careful, for he is a very —— in strength and alertness——"

The officer, planting himself before Hampton, lifted his sword.

"Señor, it is my duty to arrest you," he exclaimed dramatically. "Do not force my brave soldiers to use their weapons——"

Hampton caught at a desperate chance. It was still possible that this spy had been too busy seeking for him to communicate with Doña Hermana—if this were so, then he had a chance to get clear.

"Señor capitan," he said gravely, with a bow, "I fear there is some mistake, since I am no *gringo* but a Basque gentleman, and have done nothing which might cause my arrest."

The officer bowed in return.

"Señor Basque, I am desolated, but duty is the master of all men. This worthy señor, well known to me, accuses you of having slain and robbed his brother. There is no doubt of your innocence, of course, but at the same time the accusation must be brought before the *Jefe*——"

"If you will withdraw your brave soldiers, señor capitan," said Hampton, "and allow me a momen't private conversation with this señor, who is evidently a gentleman of the *gente fina*, I will speedily convince him that he has mistaken me for another man."

The officer turned to the scowling peon, who, hand on knife, was obviously puzzled by Hampton's calm acceptance of the situation. A word passed, then the officer assented.

"Very well, señor Basque, but I implore you not to draw upon yourself the deadly fire of my men."

The white-clad, barefoot soldiers withdrew in a wide semi-circle. The peon took a step forward, his eyes probing Hampton with a sneer.

"Well, *gringo?*" he demanded. "You think I can be mistaken, eh? You need not attempt to bribe me—you know whom I serve."

"Fool!" said Hampton quietly. "*Bobo* that you are! Why have you not reported this affair to Doña Hermana? Now look at this token, and beware what you do!"

He handed the peon the little bone slab bearing the two characters. The peon held it to the light streaming from the hotel windows, and uttered a sudden gasp. His manner completely altered.

"Señor!" he exclaimed, passing it back to Hampton. "Señor — how was I to know? You answered the description, and those gringos told me your name—*ay di mi!* We have searched the hotel here for you—they said you were lodged here. Pardon this error, señor; I kiss your hands and feet——"

Stammering incoherent apologies, the peon turned to the officer and with many appeals to the saints deplored the error that he had committed. He then appeased the officer's disgust with a few coins, and in two minutes the soldiers were marching away.

"Señor," said the peon humbly, "I did not know that señor Dias had sent——"

Hampton was not slow to take a chance, if he might thus get rid of the man.

"Has anything been discovered of that Indian?" he demanded.

"You mean, señor, the hombre called El Hambre? No, but I have hopes——"

"Then you will find him at Gorgona. Get out of the city, and reach Gorgona before dawn if possible—he will be there, unsuspecting. When you return, report this matter to Doña Hermana at once. You are not to arrest El Hambre, but have him put out of the way."

"*Sí, sí*, those are the orders, señor," exclaimed the other eagerly. "I can get out of the city and procure a good mule—*sí*, it shall be done! Have you no other commands?"

"None," said Hampton, "except to make haste."

"This moment. *Va usted con Dios, señor amo!*"

"*Hasta luego*," returned Hampton indifferently, and passed into the hotel.

That last farewell, couched in the phrase used only by men of Indian blood, told him that the peon regarded him as a superior; still, since the spy supposed him to be stopping in the hotel, it was as well to carry on the game. Hampton stood talking for a few minutes with a group of New York men, then, convinced that the spy had departed, he left the place, crossed the plaza, and made all haste toward the Inn of the Golden Pomegranates.

As he entered, old d'Aquila beckoned him into a corner.

"Señor, your friend has returned, and three other men are now in the room with him. My brother's son is here, but in hiding."

"Send him to the room at once, then," said Hampton. "It is quite safe."

He went on to the room, where he found Job Warlock, with Adam Johnson and two other men of the Beverly company. These three were vastly different from the emaciated skeletons of the afternoon; fed and clothed, shaved and cleaned, they were more like themselves, and they wrung Hampton's hand with fervent expressions of gratitude.

"And, Dick, here's a little present from all of us," said Adam Johnson, holding up a rifle. "It's one of the best we could find in town—we want you to know how we feel about everything; we're all mighty sorry for the past, Dick, and we'd like you to have this rifle as a sort of testimonial from the whole company, or what's left of it. We didn't have time to get it engraved, but it's said to be a fine weapon ——"

Hampton examined the silver-mounted rifle, a fine specimen of English workmanship, and accepted it without demur, more than grateful for the feelings which inspired the gift. At this moment the door opened, and El Hambre stepped into the room with a grave salutation.

When Hampton had introduced the Indian, he proceeded straight to business. El Hambre produced the knife with the silver hilt, which Adam Johnson and the other two men at once recognized, and related how on two occasions he had seen it in the possession of Dias. He also told something of what he knew about Dias.

"Now, gentlemen," said Hampton, "it might be easy to think that I had inspired this testimony; but taking it along with what you already know of Day ——"

"Nonsense, Mr. Hampton!" one of the other men broke in warmly. "We've l'arned enough about that skunk Day, you'd better believe—lord knows what he's done to the rest of the company! So it was him killed poor Jed Barnes, eh?"

"It was," said Hampton. "Because he was afraid of me—he had learned that I was after him—he had me set adrift. I didn't know he was my man, you see. Had a letter from my brother Eli about a chap named Winslow or Dias, and like a fool I blurted it out to James Day, who was the very man. Well, there you are! It's evident enough to me that he slipped into Jed Barnes' cabin ——"

"Say no more, sir," exclaimed Adam Johnson, who knew enough Spanish to have followed the testimony of El Hambre. "We shall take upon ourselves to clear your name at home, be sure of that. Some of us are going home, a few of us are going to California. If you suspect that Miss Barnes and the officers of the company will meet foul play at the hands of Day, we shall be glad to follow you ——"

"You can't do it, Johnson," said Hampton. "Thanks for the offer, but it's impossible. Three of us can get through where more would fail. I expect to be out of Panama by daybreak, but don't breathe it to a soul. Day has men here, and I only avoided arrest tonight by a bit of luck—they're after me. If you'll clear up this murder charge at home, I'll feel amply repaid for the little I've done."

"Depend on us for that," said Johnson, and presently got his two companions away.

Left alone, the three men regarded one another, then Job Warlock grinned.

"What's this about arrest, matey?"

Hampton produced the bone tablet and handed it to El Hambre. The Indian started, and his dark eyes swept up in tacit questioning.

"The lady saved us after all, Job," said Hampton, and proceeded to tell El Hambre of their meeting with Doña Hermana and its aftermath. The eyes of the Indian glittered savagely.

"If I had known this!" he murmured, and fingered the silver haft of the knife.

"None of that," commanded Hampton curtly. "We have all we can do to get out of here alive," and he went on to describe his experiences with the spy. "If that peon goes to Gorgona and does not return until tomorrow night, at earliest," he concluded, "we'll get away safely. Now, Job, what about the guns?"

"Got 'em," said Warlock laconically, and pointed to a heap of impedimenta on the bed. "Two good guns — one's just the kind I like. A mess o' cartridges, extra bullets, two extra horns of powder, plenty o' caps. But we'd better have a pow-wow with the Injun first of all—he ain't informed about our plans yet."

He fell into consultation with El Hambre, while Hampton examined the weapons, and listened to what was said. When he was fully informed as to the situation, the lean and cadaverous Indian squatted on the floor and began to smoke calmly; then, after deliberation, delivered his opinion:

"Señores, if you were not here, if another and better errand did not lie ahead of us, then I should remain here and try to get my knife into Doña Hermana. I am sorry that you saved her from those bandits; they did not know who she was, evidently."

The stark thirst of the man for vengeance, the deadly hatred of Dias which filled his entire being, impressed itself anew upon Hampton. Despite the Indian's intelligence and courtly Spanish veneer, his blood ran far back; close to the surface, there was in his veins a barbaric and terrible strain of ferocity, the more frightful because of the man's grimly cool poise. As when he had calmly driven his knife into that Chinaman, he seemed to lack all emotion save the driving impulse for blood. Perhaps, indeed, all other emotion had been washed out of him by tears.

"Your plans are good, señores," he went on, and now with an assertion of somber pride. "I shall go as your servant, because in the eyes of those Mexicans I am an *Indio*. Still, I do not desire to go as your guest, señores. I have many friends in the mountains, and if I need gold they bring it to me. I know that passage on this ship costs gold, so here is my share."

With this, he produced a pouch of rawhide, which he tossed out on the floor. Warlock picked it up, slit the binding thongs and with an oath of astonishment exposed to view a mass of yellow dust and small nuggets. Hampton attempted to expostulate, but was reduced to silence by the grave manner of El Hambre; he was brought to the realization that they had gained for their quest an ally, not a mere obeyer of orders, and he accepted the situation.

"This is as it should be," he said quietly, motioning Warlock to put away the gold. "You saw these men give me a rifle, El Hambre," and he touched the silver-mounted weapon. "Now, I am not a hunter, but a sailor; to me, one gun is as good as another. With you it is different. Therefore I'll turn over to you this rifle and its accoutrements. They're yours."

That reached the Indian blood. The dark eyes of El Hambre glittered and flamed, and a guttural word broke from him as he took the rifle and examined it.

"Don Ricardo, I kiss your hands," he said simply.

At this moment there came a knock at the door, and it opened to disclose the wrinkled, anxious features of old d'Aquila He came in and spoke rapidly, softly.

"Señores! There is a man here who desires speech with you—he spoke of you as two Basque señores, *ricos hombres*—and he is one of those accursed Mexicans. He says that his name is Manuelo Garcia ——"

"My schooner cap'n!" exclaimed Job Warlock.

"And," went on the old mestizo, "he seems to be in great trouble and a tremendous rage, for he is between tears and oaths. He is alone."

"Send him in, señor," said Hampton. "Guns under the bed, Job!"

In a trice the martial array was thrust out of sight, and when the host returned with the visitor, El Hambre was standing respectfully in one corner. Job Warlock greeted the skipper with great ceremony, and presented him to Hampton; he was a swart, vigorous, scowling Mexican of middle age. When he was seated and smoking, he burst into a flood of speech. One of his seamen had just reached him, at the monte table, bearing bad news. Half a dozen soldiers had gone aboard his schooner, searching her for two men supposed to be escaping from justice, and had remained aboard to postpone his sailing indefinitely.

"With them, señores," he concluded dramatically, "there was a man, apparently but a humble peon, who directed the search; and now my beautiful ship will be confiscated or detained, just when I had arranged to smuggle a fine cargo! *Que lástima,* that I should ever have come to this accursed Panama! I hastened to you, señores. There is no doubt that your enemies, those pigs of North America, have suspected your departure ——"

Hampton met a glance from Job Warlock which was eloquent, and stood for a moment stupefied by this astounding intelligence. There was no need for speech; to both of them, the event was only too clear. Instead of clearing out from Gorgona at once, the spy of Dias had hurried first to Doña Hermana—and now the lady was at work.

"What have I suffered from these —— gringos!" went on Captain Garcia, with a sigh and an oath. "In Mexico, they ruined me during the war, and my brother was killed at Buena Vista; even now, I cannot escape from them. Give me your advice, noble señores, for they are your enemies no less than mine."

Warlock was quick to assume his part.

"Beyond a doubt, señor," he made answer, "the *Americanos* suspect that we may leave aboard your ship. Perhaps we have been betrayed to them—who knows? None of them came aboard?"

"None but that peon, who must have been a spy. He has remained aboard with an officer and four soldiers."

El Hambre stirred slightly. His cadaverous and scarred visage, thrust forward, showed a malignant and wolfish expression. Garcia, glancing at him, crossed himself hurriedly

"Señores," said the Indian, "let me go aboard with the señor capitan."

Warlock and Hampton exchanged a look.

"Wait!" said Hampton. "You are going aboard now, señor capitan?"

Garcia shrugged. "But yes, señor don; it may be that they await to arrest or question me—*quién sabe?*"

"And how many men aboard?"

Garcia shrugged.

"*Dios sabe!* I had six, but three were ashore for the evening. Three men, then, if they have not run away. They are good men, brave *caballeros* of Soñora."

"And when could you sail, if free to go?"

The skipper looked again at this tall, fair-bearded man who had so swiftly taken the situation in hand.

"Señor don, in half an hour the tide is on the turn. Ah, you brave Basque adventurers! I see what is in your mind. However, it is quite useless. The moon is rising already, and the batteries would stop us if we fled."

Hampton laughed.

"The batteries? Bah! If such a man as you were in command of them, yes! But you know what these soldiers of New Granada are, my noble captain; before they could waken to the emergency, we'd be gone—and could they hit us, in any event? Not except by grace of the saints."

"*Verdederamente,*" said the Mexican reflectively, and threw out his chest. "It is true, señor don, that they are not soldiers such as we have in Mexico."

"But, on the other hand, if you slipped away, how could you return here? Perhaps it is better for you not to embroil yourself with the authorities on our behalf, noble capitan. No, we could not allow so brave a *caballero* to suffer for us. No, return our money and call off the bargain."

Job Warlock struggled to conceal a grin at this, and the Mexican rubbed his swarthy chin with a very dirty hand.

"Señor," he returned, with an embarrassed air, "I could not accept your noble offer. Never shall it be said that Manuelo Garcia fled from these dogs of New Granada! Never shall it be said that Manuelo Garcia abandoned two *ricos grandes* to the wrath of the accursed Yankees! Senores, we are brothers. Give me your instructions, and I will obey. Besides," he added with some naiveté, "I have lost most of my money at monte. Nor do I expect to return to Panama."

Hampton chuckled.

"Good. We shall shave off our beards, in order not to be recognized. Then we shall come aboard—say, in three-quarters of an hour. When we come alongside, be ready. If possible, we shall get away without causing any alarm. What about a boat?"

El Hambre spoke up from his corner.

"I can arrange for a trustworthy boatman, señor. If it is your pleasure that I accompany the señor capitan, I can see the man and send him here to guide you."

"So you want to go aboard the schooner with the captain, eh?"

"*Sí,*" responded the Indian, and uttered his harsh mirthless laugh.

Hampton looked at Job Warlock, and the latter shrugged slightly, leaving the decision to Hampton. The latter frowned in distaste, yet knew that there was nothing to be said. This was beyond question a matter of life and death. Doña Hermana was by this time aroused, and the town was probably being searched for the false Basques. The fact that the Mexican schooner was guarded, showed that the señora was not overlooking any bets. This schooner represented the sole means of escape—and not of escape alone, but of getting north upon a larger errand.

"Go, then," said Hampton. "We'll bring the weapons."

VI

"THIS," observed Job Warlock as he hacked at his beard, "is what you get for bein' smart with the señora; I hope she lands you up in a corner and gives you a piece of her mind! I bet she can give a feller plain —— worse'n any bucko mate. I wish El Hambre had stayed with us, instead of galivanting around with that silver knife. I like that Injun."

"It may yet be due to his knife that we get away at all," said Hampton grimly. "We have our backs against the wall, Job. If we're in the city tomorrow, we'll be located and clapped into jail, and we may rot there."

"Well, we won't be here," and Warlock chuckled. "The world's a good place, so hurray! We ought to get some action tonight, matey."

Hampton grunted something about having had nothing but action all day, and fell to work removing his beard.

They had barely finished dressing, when d'Aquila brought in the boatman—a sullen, silent Indian. Job Warlock got the weapons put together, and then with unwonted seriousness turned to Hampton, who was rolling up the blankets.

"Matey, I reckon there's no sense in it, but I got that same feeling that we're steering the wrong course. I didn't want to say anything about it before, thinking maybe I'd et my dinner too fast—but it's more'n that. I'm scared o' that Doña Hermana, to tell the truth."

"So am I," said Hampton. "That's why I want to get off in a hurry; if you think it's the wrong course, suppose you stay and keep her company."

"Not me." Warlock grinned and swung the bundled weapons over his shoulder. "Ready?"

Hampton nodded and gestured to the Indian. The latter led the way from the room, d'Aquila met and conducted them by a rear door to an alley, and presently they reached the plaza. The streets were still riotous, for gambling halls, cock-pits and a fandango were in full swing, and groups of convivial adventurers filled the narrow ways. All this was soon left behind, however, and the three men approached the silent beach and waterfront where less wealthy and fortunate voyageurs to Eldorado were camped under open skies. Avoiding these tents and huts, the Indian led the way along dark warehouses to the shelter of a long wharf, where boats were drawn up. He silently indicated one of these, and the white men helped him get it into the water.

Hampton's spirits rose at once, for he saw the success of their scheme assured. A thin mist, a light and miasmatic vapor which foretold new corpses to feed the bay sharks, had settled down over shore and water, hiding the stars from sight and cloaking everything in gentle obscurity. This altered everything, promising a short fight aboard the schooner, and after that a safe evasion; the craft could be towed out to catch the breeze, if necessary. The moonlight, filtering through the mist, made all things more deceptive.

"Looks good," observed Job Warlock softly, as they got into the boat and pushed out. "Looks good. Dick! Now we got Nelly Barnes dead ahead."

"I hope so," returned Hampton. The Indian made a gesture for silence, and laid out his oars. When he had wrapped these in cloths, he set to work rowing. The shore faded away, and around them was the opaline mist, while the water glistened luminously to the stirrings of the silent oars. Hampton's nostrils twitched to the tang of the salt air.

The Indian rowed stolidly, as if in perfect assurance of the way, driving the boat ahead steadily and with scarce a sound.

Warlock sat in the bow, Hampton in the stern. After an interminable time, the Indian paused in his labor, leaned forward and touched Hampton's knee, and pointed. Hampton dimly descried a blur in the mist, a faint and ghostly shape, and knew that they must be close aboard the schooner.

They now drew down upon her slowly, drifting cautiously. No sound, no lift of voices, came from her; but Hampton was aware of a stirring in the mist, and knew that a breeze was rustling upon them. So much the better, he reflected happily, as they had need of a breeze to get away. The boat floated in under the dark bulk of the schooner.

Hampton, rising, fended off with his hands as the two craft touched, and prevented a bump or jar. The Indian moved her along slowly, and presently found what he sought—a Jacob's ladder left dangling over the taffrail. Not so much as a stamp of foot came from above. Hampton caught the ladder; as he did so, the mist about them cleared away suddenly, and the full open moonlight struck down and illumined everything.

It was no time to hesitate. Hampton swung up the rounds swiftly, got a leg over the rail, and dropped to the deck. At first he thought it deserted; then, lying against the rail at his very side, he discerned the figure of a man. It was the peon, the spy of Dias, with a pool of dark blood around him and a great black gash across his serape. Hampton turned to the rail to signal Job Warlock——

Then, abruptly, all the decks seemed to leap into rushing life, the dark figures of men came sweeping in from every side. A yell split the night, and another. Hampton felt a noose encircle his body and jerk taut, then he was dragged backward, and went down under half a dozen men who piled upon him. Fighting, kicking, struggling vainly, he was dragged across the deck. The knot of bodies smashed into the farther rail and came to a halt; there, while they fell upon him and held him spread-eagled, Hampton had a momentary vision of what was happening at the opposite rail. The sight held him astounded, paralyzed.

He saw El Hambre there, surrounded by striking men, and Captain Garcia. Where they had come from, he had not the least idea then or afterward; but as he looked, Garcia plunged reeling across the moonlight with a knife-haft protruding from his breast, and El Hambre went down under the mob of men. The silver knife flashed once, and twice, and the Indian broke free—then went headlong over the rail. As the others rushed to peer after him, Job Warlock came into sight, only to vanish under a flash of blue steel.

This was all that Hampton saw, for now he was rolled into the scuppers with a line knotted around and around him, and a gag thrust cruelly between lips and teeth, while over him was flung ancient and reeking tarpaulin that closed him in foul darkness. He was sickened by the frightful completeness of the disaster; yet gradually, as his mind came from chaos to realization, he managed to piece together some details.

Garcia had not betrayed them, for the Mexican had died there—and yet the schooner had been as a trap, vomiting unsuspected men. Whose guile had set this trap? Not that of the crafty peon spy, for he had died under the silver knife, obviously. As he lay thus wondering, Hampton suppressed a sudden groan; around him were men stamping on the deck, voices issuing orders, the click of capstan pawls and the squeak of ungreased sheaves. Movement thrilled all the deck. The schooner was getting under way!

It seemed to Hampton, as he lay there, that he heard Warlock calling him, then came a shot and another. The schooner heeled over a trifle—the fog must have been dissipated by the coming breeze. Now came a pounding of naked feet, a rush of excited voices, the rattle of oars alongside; men going down into a boat, Hampton knew. Therefore, some of that crowd abroad were going ashore. He strove desperately, frantically, for freedom, biting at his gag, tearing at the rope which wound about him, but all in vain. When the spasm of furious despair wore itself out, he lay weak and trembling. He was alone on this schooner, a captive, and whither bound?

As if in response to this thought, came the dull boom of a heavy gun from the castle, but whether in salute or alarm remained undetermined. The schooner lay over more and more to the wind; the cant of deck, the rushing foam past the lee rail where he lay, the squeak and groan of straining timbers, all informed Hampton that she was close-hauled and with all sail set, doubtless running for shelter from the guns of the castle. She was certainly a prey to pirates.

Presently there was a new burst of shouts and trampling of feet. Whatever her objective, the schooner had attained it, for now she wore around; Hampton could catch the orders, which were in Spanish, and by these and the level deck detected that she was running wing-and-wing before the breeze. Then, almost at once, the stifling tarpaulin was jerked from above him and he found himself in full moonlight, with a group of men around. All were strangers.

They regarded him with an oath or two; he was commented upon as a *gringo* and in still less favorable terms—then the group opened up and fell away. A single figure advanced and stood looking down at him. With this, Hampton comprehended everything; the figure was that of Doña Hermana.

"So, my brave Basque!" said the woman, clicking her fan at him, her voice filled with soft mockery. "You decided to hurry north, as I thought you would! Well, you shall go north, and you shall interview that friend of yours, that *Americano* named Day, whom you wanted to see!"

A guffaw from the men answered this. Hampton now perceived the whole trap—the woman had outwitted them, that was all. He stifled a groan. A soft laugh broke from the señora, as she leaned forward and tapped Hampton's face with her fan.

"You shall see him, my charming Basque adventurer!" she taunted him, and somehow the gentle nuances of her voice held more menace than any threat. "You shall see him, you and I together, my dear Señor Hampton! And perhaps you shall see your brother also—no? Oh, I recall him very well indeed! A pleasant journey, my *caballero;* a pleasant journey to you, and you may reflect at leisure upon the ability with which a poor woman can fight—and learn! *Hasta la mañana,* my *caballero!*"

She curtsied mockingly and withdrew. The circle of men fell away, then gathered in again, sweeping vast bows in the moonlight.

"*Hasta la mañana, caballero!*" they echoed her words. "Until morning, brave señor, enjoy our hospitality! Until we have suitable apartments prepared for so brave a *caballero*, so great a man, a true *rico hombre*, enjoy our food and wine! All that we have is yours, señor Basque, and our master will give you welcome when he receives you."

So, with a last volley of taunts, they separated and went away to their work. Hampton lay in his bonds, eyes closed, in the shadow of the mainsail; and against the bellying canvas above him he heard the soft flapping of the reef-points, like an echo of the rat-tat-tat of frozen points against hard canvas off the Horn.

BOUND NORTH

I

THE Valley of Mercy was not originally named with an eye to irony. It consisted of a long, deep and winding gash in the volcanic desert-table of Lower California; a mile distant was the Sea of Cortez, the Vermilion Sea, now becoming the Gulf of California. All around this narrow arroyo was empty sea or emptier and more terrible desert. No travelers came this way; none of the ancient *caminos* of the padres, linking the Jesuit missions, ran near this valley. The gold-seekers who landed farther south, trying to reach California overland, died ere reaching here.

In other days, Indians had stolen palm-shoots from the missions that the Borgia gold had founded, so that now although the Indians were gone, stately date-palms towered along the narrow cañon bed. Here too were vineyards and fruit-trees and garden beds, strung out along the floor of the arroyo. Beneath the sharp, high side walls of the lower valley stretched yellow-gray adobe houses and barracks. Farther up at a curve lay the new house of Doña Hermana.

From this hidden valley, which ran down and widened into nothing near the desolate shore, a trail ran parallel to the coast until it reached the little hidden haven which was known as Puerto Escondido. Into this harbor came Dick Hampton, and, not knowing that the sad voyage was ended, eyed the dreary coast in sullen despair.

Nothing was in sight save sun-smitten rock, sand, pale and cheerless brush, thorny scrub and cactus. The desert began at the shore and ran back into low peaks of variegated hues, fiery and unutterably barren in the white afternoon sunlight.

Hampton was not the same man who had come aboard this schooner in Panama Bay; that long traverse up the coast had wrought changes. Had it not been for the memory of that last scene with his father, of the promise there sealed with a kiss, he would have lacked strength to endure; yet now he did not lack. He was held by long chains from his ankles to a ring-bolt in the foredeck. Sun, wind and sea had worked full will upon him; he was black as any Indian, foul and unkempt and tattered, bearded, and through the rags of his shirt showed skin that was seared and scarred by whips. Only his eyes were the same—cool and undaunted eyes of gray agate that blazed from his haggard face.

The woman to whom he owed his present plight, she whom men called Doña Hermana del Diablo, stood by the rail looking at him, a cruel smile hidden in her eyes. This cruelty of hers, like her beauty, was a singular and terrible thing, unlightened by any womanly gentleness or tenderness. As the wife of Potiphar must have gazed upon Joseph in his cell, so Doña Hermana stood on the schooner's deck, regarding Dick Hampton with a malignant eye.

The anchor splashed down, and a boat was lowered overside. The woman gave an order, and two of her men unfastened Hampton's chains at the ring-bolt, and jerked him toward the rail. He went, unresistant, and clambered down a rope ladder into the bow. Four men followed, taking the oars, and Doña Hermana descended into the stern. Another boat was lowered, into which tumbled the rest of the crew, and set out after the first boat for the shore.

The eager words of the four rowers apprized Hampton of the truth, and he stared wonderingly at this desolate coast, perplexed by the seeming absence of life. Glancing back at the schooner, he saw that a scrap of yellow bunting flew at her bowsprit—a signal to those ashore, no doubt. Then he caught a sharp, knowing smile from Doña Hermana, realized that she was watching him, and turned again to the shore.

The boat drew in and scraped the sandy verge. Hampton clambered out, the men followed and ran up the boat, and the señora set foot on land. She came straight to Hampton and handed him a key.

"Take off your chains, for they are no longer needed," she said. "You are free. You may go where you will—but if you do not follow us closely, you will suffer."

These words were accompanied by an enigmatic smile, and a burst of guffaws from the men around told Hampton of some deep and bitter meaning. Without response, he stooped and freed himself of the irons, which one of the men then took and carried. The second boat came in and ran her nose on the sand.

A gun banged somewhere among the rocks, and as the bullet whistled overhead, the men laughed uproariously. Hampton heard, like too-sharp echoes, the reports of other guns that dwindled in the distance on the hot afternoon—a signal was being passed. Now a man mounted on a mule appeared, riding down from the rocks to the shore. He was a half-breed, dark with Indian blood, wearing gold-laced sombrero and much tarnished finery. He dismounted, swept the dust with his wide hat to the señora, and presented her with the mule. He then greeted the other men, gave Hampton an incurious glance, and remained leaning on his rifle.

Doña Hermana, after mounting, put the mule to a hardly visible trail that went back from the shore, winding here and there among the groups of cacti, and finally becoming a wider and better defined trail that struck straight down the shore. The men followed, carrying various burdens. Hampton, ignored by them, trailed along. He perfectly understood the bitter irony of his freedom; sharks guarded the water, hunger and thirst guarded the land. It was better to slave for Señor Dias and Doña Hermana, then to perish in miserable torture. Also, Hampton had learned a frightful lesson on that voyage north from Panama. He had discovered that to these men around him he was not a man, but a beast to be tortured and tormented at the end of a leash whenever he would tug—so he no longer tugged at the leash. He accepted what came in stoic silence, which made no sport for them; and they, thinking his spirit so broken that he would no longer fight, presently ceased to find his suffering of amusement.

Indeed, as he stared at the stony trail, the cactus, the far peaks, the hot white sand, Hampton had only one thought. Close at hand, at the end of this path, was Nelly Barnes. Knowing what he now did of the brutes around him, he dreaded, rather than hoped, to see his brother Eli again. Luckily, he had no idea of how close upon him was that meeting with Eli. All his thought was of the girl.

The trail wound on, keeping parallel to the shore. Aside from the "Hidden Harbor" behind its little island, there was no anchorage or shelter for vessels, which sufficiently explained the distance between the port and the settlement of Dias. Presently the ground became appreciably higher, the sea dropped from sight, and the trail wound through a tremendous thicket of spiny bush, such as overlies the Lower California deserts in vast and matted segments. Emerging from this, Hampton found that the others had halted, Doña Hermana speaking with another rifle-armed man who had appeared; and he stared in amazement at the scene which lay before and below him.

The halt took place on an open shelf of bare rock, which lay at the verge of a chasm in the earth; this chasm was the Valley of Mercy. All around was the desert, quivering in the hot afternoon sunlight. Below, however, could be glimpsed the unwonted sweetness of green things—tree-tops, fields in bearing, the sparkle of water. Hampton stared down at the sight, then at a sudden chorus of voices swung around. Approaching the shelf of bare rock by a winding and narrow trail that mounted the cliff-side, where a number of men mounted on mules—and at their head was James Day.

Yet, after the first glance, Hampton realized fully that he was no longer facing James Day, but Señor Dias. Gone was every mark of dress or bearing that had stamped the man as an American; now, from huge sombrero to silver-studded *tapideros*, the renegade was in every aspect a Mexican. A new-grown dark mustache graced his upper lip, emphasizing the arrogance of his features, and those peculiarly glassy eyes held all the latent ferocity of an Apache.

Slipping from his mount, Dias bowed low to his señora, kissed her hand, and greeted her with evident delight—but all in the restrained fashion of the country. They might have parted but yesterday, so far as the warmth of meeting went. Doña Hermana, indeed, whose *reboso* was close-drawn, had donned with it all the demure aloofness of a Mexican woman.

"But how have you come?" demanded Dias. "Surely, the schooner——"

"I took another schooner," she returned calmly. "Ours will follow. The story is too long to be told now—see, I have brought you a gift! Look at it, then join me and ride on home, for I wish to talk with you."

Following her pointing finger, Dias looked at Dick Hampton with puzzled eyes. Suddenly recognition leaped into his face, and one astounded oath burst from him.

"—— take me, I thought you were dead long ago!" he exclaimed in English, as he stared.

He took a step forward, his predatory gaze drinking in every detail of Hampton's figure. Then his teeth flashed out in a wide laugh.

"What a meeting, what a meeting!" he cried. "And how excellently this good wife of mine seems to have entertained you——"

Doña Hermana put out a hand and touched his shoulder.

"Talk to me, not to him," she said quietly. "Come!"

"Certainly, *mi querida*," responded Dias, and waved his hand to Hampton. "You are free, my friend! Enjoy your freedom. Go where you please. If you wish food and water, come and talk with me below."

He turned to his mule, mounted, and started for the path, Doña Hermana at his side. Hampton caught a jesting word from one of the men that was illuminating.

"This little sister of the devil puts our master in leading strings, eh? Now we shall see some fun down below!"

They started down the trail, and Hampton followed, understanding perfectly why Dias needed no fetters for his slave-gang. The ghastly mockery of those few words about food and water, explained many things. The rifle-armed guards were not posted to watch for any who might escape from the cañon, but to give notice of any who arrived. The very stones of this terrible desert were impassable to any one not wearing the native hide footgear of the peninsula; even during this short march, Hampton's poor remnants of shoes had been cut to ribbons and rags by the incredibly sharp flints of the desert trail.

The down-path was not a long one, but was narrow and meandering along the cliff face, so that a few men might have held it against an army. Down below, Hampton caught glimpses of a fair-sized little creek, whose waters were conducted by *acequias* into fields of cane and lucerne and corn; date-palms nodded somnolently, fruit trees were in bearing, and the low adobe houses stood dead-gray here and there. Of the upper cañon at the bend of the creek, where stood the great house of Doña Hermana, he could see nothing.

Then, upon reaching the floor of the lower cañon, Hampton found that those ahead had halted and were awaiting him expectantly. Toiling up the cañon toward them, from where its lower reaches merged with the coast, were two carts, drawn by mules, and escorted by ragged figures. Each two-wheeled cart bore a number of stone blocks; the wheels were iron-bound segments of solid wood, whose ungreased axles filled the cañon with dismal shriekings.

Dias must have had an unpleasant chat on the way down, for he faced his mule about and regarded Hampton with a sudden burst of fury in his face.

"You are very clever, you dog!" he said, yet in a well-controlled voice. "You played a fine little game in Panama, eh? You thought the señora would believe whatever you said, eh? Well, you have learned something by this time, and you shall soon learn more. Speak up, you dog! Do you wish to earn your food and drink here, or not?"

"Yes," said Hampton, meeting those glassy eyes and knowing the horrible futility of words.

"After this," said Dias, "when you speak to me you do not say only '*Sí!*' but '*Sí, señor amo!*' Here you are a dog, nothing more, and it is I who am obeyed. You understand?"

"*Sí, señor amo,*" said Hampton. At these words the men standing around broke into wide grins; to hear upon the lips of a *gringo* Yankee these words, used chiefly by broken-spirited Indian peons, gratified their cruelty and pride—for these ruffians had pride of a sort.

"You have evidently been well trained by the señora," and Dias grinned. "So you wish to work for me, eh? Very well. I shall send for you in the morning. In the meantime, we shall ask this man in charge of the stone-cutting to take care of you overnight."

Dias turned his mule toward the approaching carts and began to roll a *cigarito.* In his air was a cruel expectancy, in the manner of the ruffians around was gleeful watching. Hampton met the gaze of Doña Hermana, and read a horrible hidden laughter in her dark eyes. He turned away gladly enough toward the carts, yet sensed that something frightful was in store for him.

Riding on one of the carts was an overseer armed with a long whip, but it was not at him that Dias beckoned with imperative hand. It was, rather, at the man in advance of the carts—a bent, sun-blackened, bearded figure clad in ragged trousers and serape, whose face was all in dark shadow beneath the wide hat of plaited grass.

At the gesture from Dias, this creature broke into a shambling, uneven run, and advanced toward the party with hat flapping and tattered hide footgear slapping the dust. Coming straight to Dias, he seized the latter's hand and kissed it effusively, with a babble of Spanish.

"*Sí señor amo!* I am here at your command—and here is the señora! Beautiful señora, I kiss your feet and welcome you home. All that I have is yours, señora——"

Suiting action to words, the man bent over the stirrup of Doña Hermana and kissed her toe, then laughed and babbled vapid compliments. With a sudden shrinking sensation, Hampton realized that this creature was an idiot.

"To me, *Bobo!*" said Dias, and the man answered with a cackling laugh to the name of fool. Dias lighted his *cigarito* and exhaled a thin cloud of smoke. "I have brought you a present, *Bobo*—a new and strong man to help you with your work. He is a *gringo,* and his name is Señor Hampton, Ricardo Hampton. You will treat him like a brave *caballero,* extend all the hospitality of your quarters to him, and bring him before me at nine in the morning. Look at him, *Bobo,* and welcome him among us!"

Hampton was wondering what refinement of cruelty lay behind all this—for he sensed such a thing very distinctly, and knew that all eyes were now turned upon him. The idiot turned and came toward him, shambling, hands hanging. Then Dias spoke again.

"Off with your hat, *Bobo,* and greet our guest politely!"

Obediently, *Bobo* doffed his wide hat and bowed in mocking welcome. A shiver passed over Hampton, and his eyes widened at sight of the hatless man. Despite the beard, despite the long hair, the haggard features, that face struck into him with frightful recognition; he stood paralyzed, speechless, incredulous, in the grasp of a stiffling horror that mounted and mounted as the fool gibbered at him. Hampton put a hand to his eyes as though to wipe away the vision—looked again, was conscious of the laughter of Dias and the men around, but heeded it not. A spasm of unutterable agony seized upon Hampton as he realized the truth.

In this poor creature he had found his brother.

"Eli!" he exclaimed, dry-lipped. "Eli! Is it you——"

"Welcome, señor, welcome!" cackled the other. "We shall give you of our best——"

A wild cry burst from Hampton.

"You devil, you devil!" he gasped out, as he turned and leaped straight for Dias. So swift and unexpected was his action that it succeeded; in blind and frantic agony of rage he caught Dias by the throat and half tugged him from the saddle.

Then the men around were upon him, kicking and striking, cursing as they drove in blows. Dias himself, freed of that grip, regained his seat and looked on, but his face was slightly pallid.

"Enough!" he said presently, and the men fell back from the half-senseless bloody figure of Hampton. "Take good care of him, *Bobo!*"

"Evidently," observed Doña Hermana, as she shook the reins of her mule, "the man needs a hundred lashes or so."

"All things in due time," said Dias, and furtively put brown fingers to his throat. "*Dios*, the man has strength! Yes, he must be broken still further—in due time."

They rode away side by side, the men following them afoot. And Hampton, as he lifted himself dizzily from the dust, heard the vapid laughter of *Bobo* at his side.

II

EVENING drew down upon the Valley of Mercy, and Dick Hampton, after bathing in the lower creek, found himself entering into the life of the damned under the guardianship of the brother he had come so far to seek—*El Bobo*, the fool.

The first shock of anguish and horror past, he steeled himself to accept the inevitable and to endure in silence, as he followed his brother and the squeaking carts from the creek along the rude cañon trail toward the rows of adobe buildings. It was growing dark now, here in the valley, and work was over for the day. The overseer's whip cracked, one unfortunate wretch howled aloud, and the others hastened to unhitch the mules.

From different directions men came toward the adobe bunk-houses—weary, ragged, sodden men, with here and there the crack of a whip to hasten some unfinished labor. They came from the fields, from the lower valley toward the sea, from the upper cañon; here and there rifle-armed guards were in evidence, though these had separate quarters higher along the valley wall. The slave-quarters were not all large. Some were small adobe shacks, with women and children in sight, and the smoke of cooking fires went up into the late afternoon coolness.

As he dragged himself along after the shambling figure of his brother, Hampton scrutinized these other figures coming in from all sides. Here and there he discerned a bowed American, shaggy and ragged like the others yet marked by a certain surly defiance that still lingered in their hopeless and scarred features; he knew none of them. There were a few Chinamen, sleek and mud-spattered figures from the fields, who bunked apart by themselves, and in the buzz of voices that arose Hampton caught a few oaths in German or French, and heard one little cockney whining over a gashed arm. The great majority of these slaves, however, were Mexicans of Spanish strain. Very few of them showed any Indian blood, while on the contrary all the guards and overseers were either pure Indians or mestizos.

Hampton followed his brother to where a pot was slung over a fire, and crowded in among the mass of men. A stumpy little Mexican woman handed out bowls of stew, with tortillas. As Hampton got his share and turned away, he found at his elbow a red-bearded American, stooped and broken, who greeted him with weary recognition.

"Hello, another Yank, eh? You're a new one, ain't you? Didn't know a ship was in. Where you from, and who roped you in?"

"My name's Hampton. I came up from Panama."

"To see the country, hey?" The other grinned and wolfed his tortilla. "I'm Pap Hoskins, from Car-lina; started to dig gold, and got hooked. If I wasn't tougher'n most, I'd be gone now. We done buried the last o' that Massachusetts crowd day 'fore yesterday. Softies."

"What crowd?" asked Hampton, with a flicker of interest.

"Bunch come up with Dias. Got hooked, I reckon. Sho', though, lots of 'em ain't hooked. Them chinks are here on contract—work so long, then get sent to 'Frisco. Well, better not talk. Lot o' spies in this gang of greasers. See ye later, Yank. Anytime ye need a drink o' cactus licker, go down to the mill. All ye want free. Helps recruit the greasers, too."

The red-bearded man from Carolina sauntered away, following a steady stream of men that was headed for the creek, where a small pulque mill was in full blast. Hampton was not slow to comprehend the diabolic ingenuity of Dias in thus furnishing the deadly juice of the big cactus leaves. It was a potent factor in breaking down such men as Pap Hoskins, who might otherwise be dangerous, and it served to keep the Mexicans in a more or less continual state of drunken stupor.

Watching the men around him, Hampton swiftly realized that his brother Eli occupied a position far above the average; and this favored lot was undoubtedly due to his mental state. *El Bobo* replenished his own bowl thrice, while those who begged a second helping were repulsed angrily by the women cooks; he could talk or jest among the guards with impunity, a liberty denied to the others. Yet with his fellow-slaves he was obviously popular enough, and he could chatter Spanish like a native.

Hampton's heart ached for the haggard, witless creature, so terribly changed from the sturdy young fellow whom he had left at home. Not a spark of recognition had awakened in that dull and vacuous countenance, even the mention of Hampton's name had evoked no response. The savage cruelty of Dias must have been satisfied to the full in that moment of meeting.

When Eli now approached him, Hampton took a desperate mental brace, faced the unhappy man, took him in his arms.

"Eli, Eli!" he cried frantically, tears leaping on his sun-blackened cheeks. "Don't you know me, boy? Speak to me—one word of English——"

Men crowded in around them, staring curiously at the new *gringo*, nudging one another and grinning over his emotion. *El Bobo* twisted clear of Hampton's grip, with a grimace.

"*El señor gringo* uses strange words," he whimpered, and the crowd guffawed.

Hampton whirled upon them in a gust of anger—then conquered himself and turned away. He felt himself broken, hopeless, at the end of everything. Without a word he followed the beckoning *Bobo* into an adobe bunk-house, was shown to a shelf furnished with tattered blankets, and slumped down on it. The witless one departed into the gathering twilight.

There Hampton was at his lowest ebb, and knew it. He sat for a long while motionless, head in hands, gripped by a measureless despair. Around him the night gathered. Other men came drifting into the place, sleeping two by two on their shelves which ranged the walls in two tiers. They stank of vile mescal, of tobacco, of dirt. Tobacco smoke filled the unlighted place. From the quarters of the Chinese, adjoining, drifted a faint, sweetish reek of opium.

What hope for escape from this hell? None. Hampton saw himself caught in the same net that had seared all these other men, that had brought his brother to idiocy; the lash, hard labor under a bitter sun—labor that alone would kill any white man—and worse than the sharp tooth of slavery, the poison-fang of depraved and vicious surroundings.

"No way out," thought Hampton, "except one. I was a fool to jump at Dias today; now they'll know that I'm not broken yet. The only possible thing I can do now is to wait, endure everything silently, and then get that —— when the chance offers. They may kill me first, but if they try it I'll go down fighting. No—it won't do to give up hope. Besides, Nellie Barnes is here somewhere! If I can find her, it would be better to die a clean death out in the desert than to perish miserably here in this vile place. No wonder El Hambre came here and went away again without doing anything! Well, I mustn't let them beat me down—my game is to strike a blow, and lie low until the time comes. For the old man back home, and for the poor boy here—and perhaps for Nellie Barnes. We'll see."

Through his thoughts there pierced a sound that aroused everything in him, that brought back before him that scene in the farmhouse with his father, while the woodpecker *tap-tapped* somewhere above. Over the odorous air of the adobe shack, sharp through the dark growl of sodden voices, came the rasping *clat—clat—clat* of palm-fronds overhead, like the flicker of reef-points against a wind-bellied main course. That sound drew a long breath from Hampton, roused up the man in him; he quietly stretched out, rolled over against the wall, and lay motionless, fighting down the torrential anguish of his soul. Like that scene in the farmhouse with his father, where a certain self-mastery had come to him, this night marked another and a greater fixation of his character.

"The world's a good place—so hurray!" he quoted softly to himself, and managed a wry smile at thought of Job Warlock.

As he lay, he heard voices at the door, and the whining peon drawl brought him sharper comprehension of the situation. The guards were there and had checked off each slave upon entering; none could now leave the place until morning came. Impressed by this evidence of caution on the part of Dias, Hampton rolled over against the wall—and his elbow rapping the adobe gave a distinctly hollow sound. Curious, he leaned aside, reached out and raked away the matted tatters of blankets there, and his fingers groped into a long and ragged hole scraped in the adobe. Then they fell upon a long knife or machete esconced in the hole.

He lay wondering, startled by his discovery. Was there some instinct of escape still dormant in the enfeebled brain of poor Eli? Or was this the token left by some former occupant of the double bunk? It was hard to say; none the less, Hampton's fingers thrilled to the touch of the blade. It meant a weapon.

There came a new altercation at the door, and the sound of his brother's vapid laugh; it went through him like a knife. Then the shambling step across the trodden earth floor, and presently a figure crept in beside him and straightened out in the bunk. His brother—here at his side in the darkness, yet unknowing! The thought was agony. The realization of that blinded intellect——

A hand reached out, touched his arm, came down to his wrist; fingers caught at his in a wild grip—a frantic and terrible convulsion of the muscles.

"Dick! Dick!" The low-breathed word reached his ear and stunned him with its import. "Are you awake, Dick!"

"In heaven's name——"

That hand shifted rapidly, clamped down over Hampton's lips, cut short his astounded ejaculation. The low whisper vibrated again at his ear.

"Careful, careful! Spies all around. Oh, Dick, it was so hard to do! But I had to do it. We don't know who the spies are—ever since I got a bad clip over the head I've played the fool—it's the only thing that has saved me! Don't spoil it now, Dick—don't spoil it! Oh, I'm so glad you've come—and so sorry——"

The words died out in a low, inchoate sob. With that, Hampton gave way; the furious back-swing of his emotion caught him up in its rush, and gathering the tattered figure in his arms he lay with sobs tearing at his throat and tears blinding him.

Weariness was forgotten—torture and mental horror, despair, wounds, all were swept aside by this overwhelming discovery. So tremendous was the revulsion that Hampton lay for a long while unable to speak, unable to trust himself; until at length he put lips to ear and broke silence with shaken accents. So in the darkness of the slave-pen came to be delivered the message from father to son. Then, after a little, Hampton mentioned that hole in the wall.

"A night's work will finish it," said Eli, little more than forming the words with his lips. "But it's no good, Dick. Can't get away. No hope on earth. Pap Hoskins is in the game with me, and so is that big Frenchman with the blue-black beard. All we wanted was a chance to strike a blow—hopeless to think of escape."

"Nelly Barnes—have you seen her?"

"Yes," uttered Eli, and in the word were volumes. "She's all right—so far. No chance to talk with her. Things are quieting down now—be careful! Wait until morning. Act a part. Make them think you're broken—or they'll use the whips. The others who came with Dias and Nellie are gone. They couldn't last long. Dias sent them out into the desert gathering wood for the fires; it killed them quickly. Now wait until tomorrow."

Hampton obeyed. Presently he fell asleep, tears on his cheeks.

Daylight came, sharply cold. Dick

Hampton wakened to find his brother's lips at his ear, and felt something thrust into his hand. It was a razor, or what remained of one.

"Use it if you want, then hide it in the hole. Come down to the creek."

Hampton hesitated. Badly as he wanted to be rid of his beard, which had regrown on the voyage north, to do so would make him a marked man; and now he had a game to play. Besides, it was no light task to secretly hack at a stiff beard, without soap or water—and he thrust the razor into the hollowed-out adobe, then pulled the matted blankets over the opening and left the bunk.

Slight attention was paid to him as he made his way down to the creek and washed. He saw nothing of his brother at first, but presently *El Bobo* appeared, carrying tortillas and a bowl of chocolate. They were alone for the time being, as whips were cracking and slave-gangs being formed up by the overseers.

"Safe to talk," said Eli, depositing his burden and flinging himself down. "We have to snatch the right time, Dick. I'm a privileged character—they found I could get out stone blocks and could carve them a bit. Besides, you're in my charge just now, until we go and see Dias. Here's breakfast, so pitch in. Did you hide the razor?"

Hampton nodded. "Can we get away at night, get a couple of mules, and hit across the desert, Eli? Is that your plan?"

The other laughed hopelessly.

"Impossible, Dick; you might as well dismiss the notion. They'd let you go in the daytime, but they'd see to it that you went afoot and empty-handed. The only way out is by that patch up the side, or else by the lower end of the cañon to the sea. Both ways are guarded, and those guards are Yaqui Indians from Sonora. How did you get here? I heard about the Beverly company and all that from the poor —— who got here with Dias—Ezra Howe was with 'em. His wife died on the way up from Panama. Dias shot him two days after they got here."

Hampton briefly recounted, while breaking his fast, an outline of his story. He had barely finished when Eli leaped to his feet and was instantly transformed into *El Bobo*, and flung a swift word at his brother.

"Look out! Here's Ramon, Dias' chief lieutenant, coming. Pure Yaqui and a——"

Approaching them was the tall, splendid figure of an Indian, garbed in all the gold-laced finery of a Mexican, about his shoulders a handsome scarlet serape. He came close to them, his glittering eyes fastened upon Hampton; his features were intelligent, darkly proud, stamped with a bitter ferocity. *El Bobo* capered up and demanded his cigaret, which Ramon accorded, then the Yaqui began to roll himself another.

"Well, *gringo!*" he said curtly. "Today your scalp is mine. Come."

El Bobo fluttered in with some question, and Ramon whirled on him with imperative gesture.

"Be off! The master has ordered me to bring this man. Go to your work, fool."

So poor Eli went shambling away, while Hampton rose and followed the tall Yaqui, in silence.

He was led up the valley, and knew that he was going to face Dias. He did not fail to observe that at sight of Ramon the other guards became very ostensibly alert, and the slaves at work shrank hastily aside; even the Chinese, who shared but slightly in the hardships of their companions, avoided the tall Yaqui with extreme care. Hampton needed no explanations to realize that this chief lieutenant of Dias was a devil rather than a man. So much was patent in the very face of the redskin.

They passed the slave barracks and the scattered houses of the guards, whose half-breed families were in full evidence, and so came to the bend of the creek. There, masked by the fruit orchard and the huge foliage of ancient fig trees, was revealed the hub of this entire place—the new house of Doña Hermana.

It was a palace rather than a house, built beside the tumbling waters of the little creek; here the towering walls of the cañon drew in on either side, dwarfing all things. The building itself was of stone, not of adobe—long and low, the roof furnished with a parapet where Hampton caught the gleam of several small brass cannon. Just across the creek was a corral, with some small adobe buildings used by the Chinese servants of Dias.

Ramon strode straight to the entrance of the house, a low doorway on either side of which were prominently displayed the same two Chinese characters which Hampton had seen on the silver knife and at the entrance of Doña Hermana's residence in Panama. The Yaqui struck a large bell, and the door was opened by a silk-clad Chinaman.

"Follow," said Ramon, and stalked in.

Hampton obeyed, keenly alert and noting every detail. Since the previous day he had become a new man—himself again, the seaman, the man of action. Outwardly he was the same sullen, silent person beaten down by the whips of misfortune; inwardly, the deathly despair was gone. He could have laughed aloud as he entered the house of Dias. True, there was no escape in sight, but there was at least the prospect of striking a blow and going down like a man instead of as a beast.

Inside the house, he was astounded beyond words by what met his eye. As in all Mexican houses, the heavy ceiling and roof were formed of logs painted in bright hues, covered over with tules or rushes, interlaced and plastered with adobe, and these in turn with the upper surface of stone-worked adobe. Aside from the logs, however, Hampton might have imagined himself in any splendid mansion of a great city, for the interior finish of the place was admirable. Aside from this, its sheer luxury was incredible. The rooms were filled, crowded with all manner of objects which spoke eloquently of loot and piracy—carpets of Spain and Turkey, jeweled and bedizened images of saints, oil paintings, furniture of all descriptions.

This brief vision past, Hampton found the *patio* opening out ahead, another Chinaman holding the door ajar for the commanding Yaqui. Two of the rifle-armed guards appeared; awnings were stretched, and bubbling *acequias* conducted water from the creek to irrigate the flower-beds whose gaudy splotches of color softened the blinding white morning sunshine. Across the *patio* was working a slave-gang, building up the far wall of the enclosure and working on a small structure which was nearing completion.

It was not at these things that Hampton looked, however. After the first glance around, his gaze came to rest on the little group of people beneath the awning. There was Dias, smoking and laughing heartily at some jest of the guard at his elbow; there was Doña Hermana, picking delicately at a dish of fruit—and, standing beside the señora, staring at Hampton with eyes wide and incredulous, was Nelly Barnes.

"Here is the *gringo* dog, señor," said the tall Yaqui, who deigned to call no man master.

III

AFTER that first recognition, Hampton dared not look again at the white face of the girl; she took a step forward, then paused and glanced at Doña Hermana. Deadly fear lay in her eyes. She wore the same simple blue dress in which Hampton had last seen her. This vision of her, standing here in the *patio*, brought a swift heart-stab to him. He looked at Dias, and in those glassy, arrogant eyes he read death. He felt suddenly afraid; it came to him that there must be no delay, no hesitation. That very night he and Eli must act, must make their desperate attempt—if he lived until tonight.

It was then, in this minute of silence, that the whole thing flashed across Hampton's brain—the terribly simple outline of the night's work. As Eli had said, escape was out of the question, for the mere idea of reaching the schooner and getting away in her was too absurd to consider, while the desert spelled death; this death, however, was better than the Valley of Mercy. There remained only to get Nelly Barnes out of this hell, strike a last blow, and go. Provided, of course, that Hampton lived until night; for in the eyes of Dias, in the slow smile of Doña Hermana, he read terrible things.

"Welcome, Señor Hampton," said Dias, leaning back in his chair and puffing his cigaret. "I believe that you came in search of a man named Winslow or Dias. Well, you have found him! You have also found the lost brother, who is one of my most valued friends. What, then, have you to say to me?"

Hampton stood silent. A thin smile curved the lips of Dias.

"What! Have you no word even for this fair señorita from your own country? Speak to her, my dear señor! Assure her of my benevolence, and congratulate her upon having found as a friend and protector my most charming señora! Indeed, Señora Dias has even arranged a marriage for her with a man of high position and much wealth, so that her future is assured."

Hampton caught a slight shrinking movement on the part of Nelly Barnes, but he remained silent, his eyes watching Dias in dulled apathy. Dias turned to the girl, smiling.

"Come, señorita! Have you no word of greeting for this *caballero?*" He repeated the words in English. Doña Hermana leaned forward and spoke brokenly.

"*Sí!* Look at zem, señorita—one is a fool, and I haf peek you a fine señor, no?"

Less from the uttered words than from the glances that were cast, Hampton comprehended with a thrill of horror that the speakers were referring to the tall, dark Yaqui, who stood to one side rolling a *cigarito.* As he understood, Hampton felt a hot wave of blood rise into his face—yet he forced himself to remain silent. Suddenly Nelly Barnes plunged down on her knees beside the chair of Doña Hermana, caught the hand of the señora, and poured forth a passionate, agonized entreaty.

"You're a woman—you'll know all it means, you have a heart!" she cried desperately. "You can't be as bitterly cruel as this monster—I know it's not your doing! Don't let them do this, señora; he can have my money, anything at all, and I'll never say a word——"

Doña Hermana drew her hand from the girl's frenzied grasp—a slow and deliberate movement which spoke far more than her coolly amused laugh or disdainful words.

"Peace, *niña!* Go to your man, but leaf me alone."

Nelly Barnes slowly drew back, then rose. Before she could speak, Dias broke in:

"Tut, tut, young lady! There before you is the man who murdered your father——"

Hampton spoke for the first time, and his voice leaped out with a cold and deadly emphasis that seemed to startle Dias.

"You lie! Nelly, that man is your father's murderer. The fact has been proven beyond all doubt. Adam Johnson and others know of it and have cleared me absolutely."

Dias leaped to his feet, with an expression of such savage ferocity that even Doña Hermana leaned aside, watching him with wide eyes.

"So you're not broken yet, *gringo!*" he cried, then flung out his hand to the Yaqui. "Take him, Ramon—his scalp is yours——"

Ramon lighted his cigaret, then slipped hand to waist and steel glittered. Hampton swiftly weighed his chances and found none—the two rifle-armed guards were close on either side. Then, suddenly, Nelly Barnes leaped forward, flung her arm across his chest protectingly, and gasped out swift words:

"No, no! I will do anything you want—I will agree to anything—let him go——"

Ramon grinned. Doña Hermana uttered a low, musical laugh. Dias stared at the girl, then shrugged his shoulders and resumed his seat.

"As you will, señorita," he said in English. Then, to Ramon, repeating his words in Spanish that both the Yaqui and Nelly Barnes might understand, he continued: "Let this man go free. Give him food and water and a mule. His life has been purchased, and the woman is yours."

Ramon put up his knife, a swift gleam in his eye, and spoke a few words in a patois that Hampton did not understand. But Hampton, knowing well enough that this action on the part of Dias was only a delusion and a snare, had seized his chance for a word. Nelly Barnes stood close against him, her brown hair brushing his cheek—and though he longed to touch her, to grasp her hand if only for an instant, he refrained, lest the motion draw attention to him. Instead, he breathed low words which could reach her ear alone.

"Tonight, midnight. Be ready. Get outside if you can."

A tremor of her arm as it lay across his chest told him that she understood—then Ramon turned to them, doffed his sombrero ironically, and swept Hampton a bow.

"Come with me, señor, and the order of our master shall be obeyed. Until later, señorita."

Nelly Barnes stood aside, gave Hampton one lightning glance of perplexity, alarm, startled wonder—then he turned and followed the Yaqui. The two guards closed in behind him, and he was escorted through the house again, gaining a breath of its coolness before stepping out into the blinding white sunlight of the valley.

Then, as the door of the building was closed, the two guards put down their rifles and seized Hampton. Swiftly, efficiently, his arms were twisted behind his back and lashed tight; he was given no chance to resist, even had he so desired. Ramon gave the guards a guttural order, then strode away toward the corrals, which were gained by a small bridge over the creek.

"Walk to the barracks, *gringo,*" commanded one of the guards.

Hampton strode along in grim silence, careless what might await him if only he were allowed to live until night. Thoroughly as he had plumbed the depths of the deliberate and diabolic cruelty of Dias, this last evidence of the man's deviltry had scored him sharply and left a deep and ineradicable hatred which was beyond expression, filling his whole spirit, burning in his tortured brain like a white flame.

Other guards assembled, and stolid half-Indian women. Then, near his own sleeping-quarters, Hampton was suddenly tripped and flung to the ground, and four men sat on him. Others drove stakes in the sun-baked earth, and in ten minutes he was being spreadeagled and lashed by wrist and ankle to the four stakes. Ramon came up with some thongs of green hide, which were eagerly seized and applied to the work. Then the tall Yaqui commanded that a fire be built up, and at once a storm of questions arose.

"No," said Ramon. "The *gringo* is not to be killed—yet. This is by the master's order; it is only a little thing."

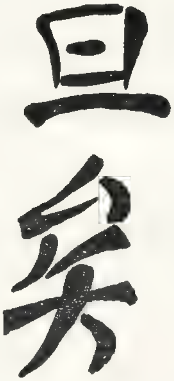
So Hampton guessed, rightly enough, that he was now to pay for that blindly furious attack on Dias the previous afternoon.

Pegged out in the hot sunlight, unable to endure the brazen sky overhead, he closed his eyes and lay silent, oblivious to the remarks and jests of those around. Time passed; what was preparing, he did not know or care. Between blistering sun above and scorching ground below, he was in a burning heat, but scarce felt it. The green rawhide thongs that tied him down were gradually evaporated in that flooding sun, until they shrank tight and ever more tightly cut into his skin, dragging out feet and hands toward the stakes. He remembered having heard of such Indian tortures—given a few more thongs to each extremity, his limbs might well be pulled from their sockets.

A sudden burst of laughter and a storm of jeering exclamations went up. Half opening his eyes, Hampton saw, bending over him, one of the silk-clad Chinese servants from the house of Dias—a wrinkled, saturnine fellow, whose very grin bore anticipations of torture. In one hand he held a brush, in the other a small pot of paint or ink. He made some remark to the crowd in Spanish which drew another outburst of mirth.

Ramon leaned over the pegged-out figure and tore away the front of Hampton's shirt. In this act, the eyes of the two men met—Hampton putting into one swift look all the things he dared not utter. The Yaqui started violently, half-whipped out his knife, then rose and turned away with a shrug; none the less, Hampton smiled a little, knowing that his message of hatred had been understood. Then he gave a sudden grunt, and found the Chinaman calmly seated upon him, brush in hand, drawing a diagram on his naked chest. Hampton had no need to ask what it was—those same two characters were embroidered on the silken blouse before his eyes. A cackle of mirth broke from the celestial, and he looked at the staring crowd who had gathered close.

"Look!" he exclaimed in very good Spanish. "Observe the beauty of this writing, which you do not understand! But I will show you what it means. Here above is the character *tan*, which shows the sun just above the horizon; it means the morning, or what you call *dias*—it is our word for the name of the master. Now below it you see me writing the character named *i*, which in the ancient writing of my country shows an arrow fixed in a target. It means that something has been done or finished, and the two characters together mean that our master has approved or done this thing—it is a seal made for our master by the eminent Yu Szu Lo of Canton."



The yellow man concluded his writing and his exposition at the same moment, and then rose. Hampton was vaguely astonished by this explanation of the mysterious insignia used by Dias; but he quite comprehended that his astonishment would not last long.

Nor did it. He had closed his eyes again, when a keen breath of anticipation, a rustle and low mutter of words, apprized him that the next step in the program was at hand. He peered up as a shadow barred the hot sunlight from his face, and beheld the tall shape of Ramon standing above him.

"Look and enjoy, señor!" said the Yaqui, grinning, and stooped. In his hand was a white-hot iron from the fire, specked with scintillating particles.

Hampton threw back his head; at the touch of the iron he quivered, but made no sound. For an instant he thought that iron was about to be plunged into his throat—then he felt the caress of a burning finger touch his breast, and realized the truth. He was being branded with the seal of Dias.

"Deep, Ramon, deep!" went up the fierce cry from those crowding around, but the Yaqui did not heed. He had certain specific orders from Dias, which forbade him to work any real injury or to put the prisoner beyond ability to labor and endure the deadly sun-torture in the surrounding desert; so, that the *gringo* might be able to set forth with a wood-gathering party in the morning, grubbing out mesquite and juniper from the blazing desolation, Ramon touched lightly with the iron, little more than searing the skin.

The agony was exquisite, as the hot iron followed the painted lines, bringing out in a whitish blister the shape of the Chinese characters traced there. Even more exquisite and frightful was the pain when at last the Yaqui grunted and rose to his feet, and the sunlight struck down to scorch the seared skin. Yet those who watched so eagerly saw nothing, beyond a slight convulsive tremor of Hampton's body; then that body relaxed and lay without further movement. The captive had fainted.

When Hampton opened his eyes again, blinded and dazzled by the sun, it was to feel the keen anguish of a hand upon his burned chest. Then he saw the ginger whiskers of Pap Hoskins outstretched above him, and heard the voice of the man from Carolina in his ear.

"Everybody's eatin'—reckon I can spread this grease 'thout bein' caught. Your brother's fair wild and we're keepin' him away——"

"Tell him—get loose tonight!" croaked Hampton, and groaned. "Water, water!"

"I got some right handy, son. Lucky you been layin' out in the sun after all—done took out the fire. I'll lay some more grease in your bunk. Reckon they'll cut you loose right soon. Tonight, eh? All right. Here come two o' the devils now, so shet up."

While he spoke, Hoskins was deftly spreading some sort of grease across Hampton's inflamed skin. Then he lifted an olla and let some water drip into the open, swollen mouth. Several of the guards and other prisoners came up, but made no comment, and after a moment Hampton found himself alone again. He realized that it was past noon, and that many of the slaves had gathered around. By this time the rawhide thongs were so tightly stretched that he had lost all feeling in hands and feet, which were swollen and purpled.

Presently whips cracked, orders were shouted, and the labor of the day was taken up afresh. When silence had settled down, Hampton was dully aware that some one was close beside him, and with the torture of thirst again upon him, he spoke:

"*Agua!* Water!"

An ironic laugh made answer, and he peered up to see Dias gazing down at him.

"Water, eh?" Dias chuckled. "He asks water—get him some, *querida mia!*"

"Indeed! Get it yourself," made answer another voice, and Hampton knew that Doña Hermana was behind his head. "You are a fool to treat him so lightly; I tell you the dog will make trouble yet if he is not killed."

"Why kill him quickly?" responded Dias. "Three days in our charming desert, and then the symbol burned into his back—and in four days more Ramon will have a scalp to wave before his new woman. You hear, Hampton? Tomorrow we celebrate the marriage of my faithful Yaqui. You shall be the guest of honor, and *El Bobo* shall give away the bride."

Hampton did not open his eyes again or make any response. Presently the two moved away, and it was a little later that he felt a sudden relaxation of his tortured flesh. When he looked around, he found that one of the guards was cutting him loose.

"Go to your kennel, *gringo* dog," said the guard, and sauntered away.

For a long while Hampton lay helpless. At last he managed to sit up, and despite the burning anguish that enveloped him, began to chafe his wrists and ankles, which were cut and bleeding from the thongs. With the restored circulation, his head was whirling with the access of pain, when he looked up to see two figures passing by. They were Dias and Ramon; both men were too occupied to notice him, and halted a short distance away. To them came running a half-naked Indian. Dias flung a question at him:

"You are from the harbor? What is it?"

Hampton comprehended that they had been signaled the arrival of this messenger, and had come forth to meet him. The panting Indian made answer.

"*Sí, mi señor amo!* We have sighted the schooner, that of Señora Dias, which was left behind. The wind is very light, however, and she cannot get in before sometime tonight."

"Good," exclaimed Dias heartily. "No sign of the other schooner, my own?"

"No sign, *señor amo.*"

Dias waved his hand. "*Bueno!* Return and tell your comrades that they may come in at sunset; there will be no need of keeping watch at the harbor tonight."

Dias and the tall Yaqui turned and strode back up the cañon, but Hampton sat in absolute dismay. Unconsciously, despite its impossibility, he had cherished a faint hope of escape by way of the sea, for he knew that the schooner which had brought him must be still lying in the hidden harbor. Now this tenuous hope was completely dashed. This second schooner, which had taken the devilish señora south and which she had left to follow her, had arrived in time to block even the faintest chance of escape.

After a little Hampton gained his feet with some difficulty and staggered down to the creek. There, standing in the cool water, he laved his hurts and drank his fill, unhindered; and gradually returning to a sanely balanced mind, found himself not vitally hurt—the strain of the torture itself had worn him down more than the actual suffering. He made his way back to the barracks, now deserted. Finding his own shelf-bunk, he discovered in it a bundle of rags and an earthern bowl containing some grease.

Mentally blessing Pap Hoskins, he daubed the grease on his wounds, wound the rags about his body, and then crawled into his bunk. He was asleep almost instantly—his last conscious thought a memory of the dark features of Ramon the Yaqui.

IV

WHEN Hampton wakened again, it was to darkness. The reflection of cooking fires outside cast a very faint glow into the bunk-house, where men were talking and smoking; the slaves of Dias were not supplied with lights, but were given a goodly allowance of tobacco. The guards at the entrance were checking off those who entered, as usual.

Hearing a soft sound of sobbing, Hampton put out his hand and found his brother lying at his side. Eli gripped his fingers quickly, with a low word.

"Dick! I've been half-wild today—to think that it was to help me you came here——"

"Shut up," said Hampton curtly. "I'm not hurt. Did Hoskins tell you about tonight?"

"Yes." Eli controlled himself. "You're feeling able to walk?"

"Able to do more than walk, I hope," said Hampton grimly. "I don't say that I enjoyed myself, but I'm not much hurt. Hoskins got me some grease that helped a lot."

"He was keeping that to use on himself—Dias threatened to burn him, last week. Well, Dick, you'll have to let me over next the wall; if I'm to finish cutting the hole, it must be now before the noise quiets down. I'll get out first."

There was no room for Eli to crawl over his brother, so when the bunk was clear, Hampton sat up and swung his feet to the floor, while Eli crept in past him. Much to his own surprize, Hampton found himself in much better condition than he had anticipated. Every movement cost its share of pain, naturally, yet his freedom of movement in general was not restricted; and on that unhappy traverse up from Panama, Hampton had learned anew the admirable results of muscular pain coupled with necessary exertion. All seamen were compelled to learn that lesson at bitter cost—yet Hampton had now learned it in ways not of the sea.

"I'm fit enought," he muttered to Eli, as he took the outside place. "Once let me get a grip on that Yaqui, and I'll give him something to remember me by! Who else goes with us?"

"Talk later," grunted Eli, who was head and shoulders inside the wall opening. "Got a foot of adobe yet to cut through."

Hampton composed himself in patience, thankful now for the noise as the half-drunken men continued to come up from the pulque mill. He could hear the machete busily at work in the four-foot wall, whose adobes crumbled rapidly before it; and presently, by the occasional whiff of fresh air and the sound of falling fragments, knew that Eli was through the wall. He lay breathless, fearful lest some one hear the sounds, but no alarm was raised, and after a bit Eli, breathing hard, was back beside him and stuffing blankets into the opening.

"Now we're fixed," said Eli, in an inaudible murmur, his lips at Hampton's ear. "I got word to Frenchy—he and Hoskins will be along, and maybe a couple of greasers I've sounded out. Can't trust many. At midnight the guards are changed and they come poking in here and there, so, quick's they've gone, we'll get to work."

Hampton, not trusting himself to respond, lay quiet, and presently dozed off again.

He wakened to a light before his eyes, blinked into a lantern just above his face, and heard the Yaqui guards exchange a jest; it was midnight, the inspection and change of guard were under way. Beside him, *El Bobo* flung an oath and an incoherent babble at the guards, who laughed and passed on. Their lantern bobbed a moment at the door, then passed outside.

A dull sound came from the wall, and a breath of cold, clear night air. Then the low voice of Eli.

"Come on. They'll be along any minute."

"They" referred to Hoskins and the others, no doubt. Hampton rolled over and shoved his legs at the ragged hole. Movement cost him a good deal of pain, of course, though not enough to hamper him in action; he wriggled into the hole, felt his feet gripped from the outside, and presently scraped through into the open air. Eli caught and supported him, helped him find his feet.

"Wait here for the others," said Eli, his voice athrill with eagerness. "Keep 'em quiet. I'm going to get the guards—they belong to me—I don't calculate to let Pap Hoskins cheat me neither—he'll get his knife in 'em first if he has the chance——"

The dark figure melted away.

Hampton found himself standing alone at the rear of the adobe barracks. Brilliant starlight showed him the cactus-dotted hillside and the black cañon wall behind; all else was cut off by the long adobe building. The night was cold, crystal-clear. Under the blazing stars objects stood out distinctly.

A low scuffling sound—Hampton turned to the hole in the adobe wall, caught a foot as it protruded, and tugged. Came tumbling out a ragged figure with immense black beard; this was the Gaul known as Frenchy, and he emerged sputtering softly and spitting out adobe dust.

"Name of a name, the hole is too small for me! Who is here?"

"Be quiet," said Hampton. "The others?"

"Are coming. Brr!. Freedom! Liberty!" Frenchy slapped himself vigorously.

Presently a lithe, half-naked Mexican came squirming through the hole, followed by a second; Eli had some good reason for trusting the pair, and Hampton helped them clear. Almost at once, Pap Hoskins came along head first, gripping the tattered blankets which he tugged after him.

"Got to close that hole—gettin' right cold in there," he grunted as he gained his feet. "Don't want to wake 'em up——"

He stuffed the rags into the gaping hole, then turned and grunted as he surveyed the others. A soft laugh broke from him, and he gripped Hampton's hand.

"All right? Where's Eli?"

"Said to wait for him——"

An oath from Frenchy, a low alarmed word from the Mexicans. Hampton turned, to see the glow of a cigarito at the nearer corner of the adobe building. The smoker came toward them. In the bright starlight there could be no mistaking the outline and swagger of that figure, its immense sombrero, its cloaking serape, its rifle.

"A Yaqui—a guard!" said Hoskins, and caught his breath sharply. The others remained silent, huddled against the wall in consternation. Hampton, wondering that the guard had not already seen them and sent out a call, stepped sharply forward.

"We may talk in peace now," said the Yaqui, and broke into a low laugh. It was the voice of Eli.

In the plot as they were, the others stared in amazement at this metamorphosis of the shambling *El Bobo*. He came forward and flung down another serape and sombrero, with a rifle, at Hampton's feet.

"There you are. Now, then, who's in command here?"

"I am," said Hampton. "If you others agree."

Frenchy uttered a laugh.

"What matter?" he said in Spanish. "You as well as another. We die in any case."

"Certainly," said Hampton. "Dias' other schooner got into the harbor tonight, or was sighted. That ends our only chance of getting away by water. Now it's the desert, and one blow at Dias before we go down. Has any one a better project to offer?"

No one had, it appeared. The two Mexicans laughed softly, Frenchy squatted and with them rolled *cigaritos* from the supplies Eli had captured, and Pap Hoskins profanely told Hampton to go ahead and give orders.

"Can we count on any general rising of these other men?" asked Hampton.

"None," spoke up Frenchy in disgust. "A few would help, yes, and all would break out if restraint were totally removed—but they have no heart to fight while a single Yaqui is in sight."

"Can we reach the desert above by any other way than the one path?"

"No, unless we go down the valley several miles to the sea and circle around."

"What about getting horses or mules away without discovery?"

"Impossible," said Eli. "Even if we had them, they would be no good to us in the desert. The Yaquis would run us down in no time."

"Very well." Hampton, who had flung the serape over his shoulder, donned the sombrero and picked up the rifle. "Eli, you and I will go after Nelly Barnes. Pap Hoskins, you take the others and make for that trail. We must hold it. I'll create an alarm at Dias' house that will draw most of the guards, then we'll join you. As to arms——"

"Don't worry 'bout us," said Hoskins significantly. "We aims to catch a few o' them Injuns on our way acrost the valley—same's Eli done. So you're goin' for the gal, eh? All right. I don't expect you'll get fur, but go ahead. It don't matter much how we peter out, so long's we go down hard. We'll wait for your rumpus to start. So long."

He turned to Frenchy and the other two. Eli plucked Hampton's serape, and the two brothers stepped along the wall into the darkness, leaving a murmur of voices behind. Eli held out a cigaret he had rolled, with his own for light.

"Take it easy; we're all right. We'll be taken for guards if any one sees us. That's why I brought along the sombrero and serape for you. If any one comes close—the machete."

Hampton puffed at his cigaret, swung around the corner, and advanced with Eli toward the upper valley. Here and there lanterns burned, by the entrances of other barracks; a faint whiff of opium lingered on the cold air; nothing stirred in the starlight. They left the adobe buildings behind, heard two guards exchanging jests from some dark corner, and so came to the dark masses of the orchard, the heavy figs and the scattering of vines and fruit trees, at the elbow of the cañon. No alarm had come from behind them; all the lower valley was dark and empty, and Pap Hoskins was evidently keeping his companions in check.

"What about weapons for them?" asked Hampton, as he tossed away his *cigarito*.

"That's what Hoskins is after," and Eli laughed softly. "Those guards have an adobe shack down below, with all kinds of weapons and ammunition. Dias has racks of new revolvers in that house of his, though. We'll see. Nelly Barnes is going with us?"

"Yes."

"Too bad; we'll not go far, then," said Eli grimly.

"I told her to be ready at midnight, and to come outside if possible. Where would we find her?"

"Probably by the left side of the house, toward the creek, where that big pepper-tree stands," said Eli. "There's usually a guard around there, and another by the corral where the Chinos live. I want a crack at Dias while we're there."

"You won't get it," said Hampton. "You'll take Nelly in charge and lead her across to that trail by the quickest way. I'll stay to raise a fuss, then I'll find my way across. No arguments, lad. Your time comes soon enough."

Eli grunted, but forbore to protest, as they were advancing toward the house. From somewhere far beyond, in the desert out above the cañon wall, rose the sobbing wail of a coyote to the stars. A voice in the shadow of the giant pepper-tree mimicked it perfectly, and flung out a laugh. A match flamed, and the red glow of a *cigarito* became visible.

"*Quien es?*" came the careless voice of the guard. "You've been down to the pulque mill, Pablo? I hope you brought——"

The words ended in a startled silence. From somewhere far down the valley rose a shrill astonished cry in words that echoed high and far. "*Porque me tires?* Why do you strike me?" One of the guards, perhaps, caught by Hoskins. Silence followed instantly, no further cry was heard, but Hampton walked straight in upon the figure beneath the pepper-tree. There could be no hesitation now. The cigaret point guided his fingers to the brown throat; the thought of action after these weeks of helpless torture maddened him, caused a furious access of savagery in his grip; like steel talons, his fingers ripped the life out of that brown throat before the cigaret had been extinguished in the dust. Without a sound, without a movement, the guard was dead. Eli, too late with his machete, stood aghast and horrified.

"Get his rifle and caps," said Hampton quietly. He straightened up, and sent his voice into the darkness in a guarded call. "Nelly! Nelly! Are you here?"

An instant of silence, the fluttering sound of a breath sharply caught, then the girl's voice sounded softly.

"Here, Dick, at the window, but there are bars."

Hampton was already following the sound of that voice. It conducted him to a window in the side wall of hewn stone—not a window of glass, but in the ancient fashion of the country framed solidly in wood and barred by heavily carved wooden grille. Against this, as he came close, Hampton made out the figure of Nelly Barnes, one hand thrust through the openings.

"Stand back," he ordered, and thrust his rifle-barrel into the grill-bars, and then flung his weight on it. There was a sharp crash of dried wood, and half the barrier came away.

"Out—quickly!"

As the girl emerged, Hampton caught her, heard a startled call ring out from somewhere, and then held Nelly to him for an instant. Careless of the pain, he crushed her against his breast, touched his lips to hers—then thrust her at his brother.

"Eli! Take her quickly. Go with him, Nelly—I'm coming presently. Steal off, now, both of you! Not an instant to waste."

Bewildered, daring no protest, the girl was swept off into the darkness by Eli, and Hampton turned to the window. A guard was approaching from somewhere, drawn by the crunch of shattered wood. Hampton threw the fragments of the grill inside and then followed them with a swift and silent leap.

Once inside the place, he caught a faint thread of light—a dim radiance that led him to an open doorway. He found himself looking out upon the patio, where, along the cloistered wall, little night lamps of oil flickered in niches. Hampton, smiling grimly, stepped to the nearest, took the lamp, and with it returned to the room he had just quitted. He set it on the floor and glanced around.

He was in one of the luxuriously furnished rooms, crowded with fine furniture and precious loot of all kinds, and a doorway led into an adjoining room which was racked with rifles, revolvers and pistols of all descriptions. Hampton seized half a dozen Colt revolvers, strung them together by the chin-thong of his sombrero, filled the sombrero itself with caps and prepared cartridges from the neat piles. He clapped the sombrero on his head again, hung the revolvers about his neck and behind him, then loaded two more revolvers for himself. With these, he returned to the former room.

No alarm seemed to have sounded—from the window he could discern nothing, could hear nothing; he realized that only a few moments had passed since that guard had perished beneath the pepper-tree. Now he heard the voice of another guard calling softly, knew that the second had approached and was searching. Smiling, Hampton turned back into the room, seized the brittle fragments of the grating he had flung inside, and went to the lamp. In two minutes a heap of furniture was dimly illumined by the creeping bluish flames of spilled oil. Once those flames reached the plastered reeds and timbers of the ceiling, they would not easily be quenched.

"*Que es?*" came the startled cry from outside. "What fire is that?"

The figure of a Yaqui came to the window opening, peering into the room. Hampton raised his revolver and fired; then, struggling under his load, he climbed from the window, caught up the dead guard's rifle, and emptied it in the direction of the corrals.

The alarm was given.

V

HAMPTON remained beneath the pepper tree, adjusting his loads and coolly awaiting the moment to complete his work.

His view of the lower valley was cut off, but the absence of any shots and the sharp repetition of voices told that the guards were centering all attention on himself. From the buildings across the creek came shriller voices and bobbing lights; from inside the house of Dias arose questioning calls and shouted demands. The flames in the room mounted higher and gained foothold on the ceiling.

Now from the servants' quarters came lanterns and running men, Chinese by their voices, pouring toward the house of the master. In the other direction, the orchard resounded with trampling feet and low cries as the Yaqui guards came hastening up from the barracks. Hampton, lost to sight in the blackness beneath the wide tree, saw the groups of men approach in the clear starlight, questing what was wrong, aiming at the ruddy light of the window.

They found what was amiss when Hampton's revolvers began to speak. He fired deliberately, coolly, emptying his weapons with deadly effect, while the Chinese shrieked in wild consternation and the Yaqui guards cursed as the bullets struck them down. Rifles began to make response. Hampton left his position and slipped across to the shadow of the fruit-trees that ranged the creek, and started for the lower valley.

Behind him was pandemonium. Flames were spouting in air, men were shooting blindly, and above the din of voices rose the stentor-blast of Dias. Hampton, not pausing to reload his heavy revolvers, made his way along the creek, turned the cañon elbow, and after one last glance at the ruddy glare behind, hastened on his way. From all quarters of this lower valley the guards were hurriedly converging upon the scene of alarm, their shouts ringing near and far.

Hampton plunged into the creek, which was only waist-high here, and crossed to the far side, where there was a trail. He had barely come into this, when he discerned a tall figure coming toward him, and a voice leaped at him fiercely:

"Where are you going? What is the matter up yonder?"

Hampton recognized Ramon, and laughed softly.

"Do you not know your friends at night, Ramon?" he demanded.

"Who are you?" demanded the tall Yaqui, coming up to him.

"I am the *gringo*, and pay my debt thus," rejoined Hampton, and struck out with the heavy Colt.

The front sight lashed Ramon across the eyes and face, cutting deep and sending the blood spurting, drawing a cry of startled anguish from the Yaqui. Instantly Hampton struck again, this time across the forehead, and again the weapon went deep. Dazed and staggered by those blows, blinded by the blood, Ramon snarled like a wolf and whipped out his knife—but a third time the heavy iron smote him, and under the blow the facial bones crunched and gave. He took a step backward, then whimpered and fell groping in the dust, and writhed there, a crushed and blinded thing.

"Remember the *gringo* now, you dog," said Hampton, and went on his way again.

He was not sure where to find the trail that ascended to the desert, but presently, from the dark cañon wall, heard a shot and a wild yell; then a burst of shouts went up, and he caught Eli's voice. Instantly he lifted a ringing shout, which Eli answered, and in five minutes Hampton had located the trail and found himself greeted by Pap Hoskins.

"That you, Hampton? Eli's on above with the gal. We got the trail—I'm stayin' here to hold it a spell. We got rifles and a heap o' shootin' supplies. What's burnin' yonder?"

"The house of Dias," said Hampton, and Hoskins uttered a howl of joy.

Pushing on up the trail, Hampton stumbled over a dead Yaqui and presently caught up with Eli and Nelly, who greeted him with a cry of delight. The mounting trail gave them plainer view of the growing conflagration up the cañon, and Hampton briefly related what he had done.

"We might have a chance to fight through to the schooner, had it not been for the other schooner arriving tonight," he concluded, but Eli dissented.

"No—listen! Shots from up above. The Injuns up there will spread out and hold us. I know a first-rate place to make our stand if you say so—unless you want to run for it"

"No use running," said Hampton. "Go ahead and secure the position. We'll wait up above."

He held Nelly against him in the darkness, and her hand crept into his. Eli was gone up the trail.

"We can't escape, Dick," she said quietly.

"We'll not try the impossible, dear," he responded. "All we can do is to go down fighting."

"Then I'll do my share, and be thankful when the evil dream is all over! Nothing ahead can be any worse than what is behind."

A laugh broke out ahead of them, and the bearded Frenchy came into sight, exultantly waving a rifle.

"*Hola, mes amis!*" he cried jovially. "They have us in check up above, but *El Bobo* and the two Mexicans have gone on to take up a position. I came to meet you. What is the bonfire down below, eh?"

Hampton told him, then got rid of his revolvers and ammunition. Frenchy was delighted, and cheerfully assumed the load. Presently all three gained the open platform at the head of the trail, and Frenchy pointed out the situation. A hundred yards, or less, along the brink of the cañon, was a crown of loose boulders rising from the cactus thickets; this was the position which Eli had gone to seize, and a glance showed Hampton its value, as it commanded the head of the trail from below, that approaching from the sea, and the surrounding desert. Slight as was this eminence of a few feet, it was a natural fort ready for defense.

From the cactus, rifles spat fire, and again, in a sudden burst of sound. Frenchy slid softly away into the darkness, and Hampton pulled the girl into shelter of a boulder.

"Wait here and see what happens," he said. "The fire's dying down—Dias has brought water from the creek. Hello! Some one coming up the trail——"

Puffing breaths and hasty footsteps drew his attention, and the newcomer proved to be Pap Hoskins, who had come up to see what was going on. At the same moment Eli came cautiously back from the edge of the platform, two bullets burning after him.

"All right!" he exclaimed guardedly. "Make a break for it with Nelly, Dick—we'll bring the loads. Frenchy! Where are you?"

Frenchy cursed from the darkness, and bullets began to whine all around from the Yaquis who were flung out in the cactus. Hampton, seizing Nelly's hand, rushed her across the open platform to the rocks beyond; stumbling among the boulders, torn by the thorns on every side, they approached the crown of jutting fragments, where the two Mexicans awaited them. A cry broke from the girl as she stumbled over the body of a Yaqui—then they were in shelter of the high rocks, and one of the Mexicans pressed a rifle on Hampton.

What came next was sharp and vicious—Eli, Frenchy and Hoskins staggering under heavy loads toward the crown of rocks, while Yaqui yells arose piercingly and rifles stabbed crimson in the darkness. There were only three or four of the enemy scattered around, and on them Hampton and the two Mexicans fired; before the rifles could be reloaded, Eli and his companions came in, unhurt, and dropped their loads of ammunition and food.

Now, divining the purpose of the white men, the two Mexicans protested vividly that they desired to take their chance in the desert. Despite the curses of the others, accordingly, Hampton told them to take food and ammunition and go—water there was none. They made up loads and slunk away, having no stomach for what lay ahead in this place.

"Four of us," observed Pap Hoskins, "and we got extry guns, and revolvers all around—I don't guess we-all are beat yet!"

"Five of us," added Nelly Barnes. "I'll attend to the reloading, and maybe I can use a pistol if I have to! Dick, spread out that big serape of yours and bring those guns here, and show me how to load those Colt revolvers——"

Taking up a strategic position between two of the central boulders, Nelly Barnes was soon hard at work, the four men spreading out to answer the desultory fire from the few Yaquis around. Since no alarm was heard, it seemed that the two Mexicans had managed to sneak through undiscovered; none the less, their fate was certain.

The conflagration had died out in the cañon below, being succeeded by a confused tumult, through which pierced occasional yells to answer those emitted by the Yaquis above. Leaving these last to his companions, Hampton settled himself with extra rifles and revolvers to watch that platform at the head of the trail, and it was not long before his patience was rewarded. Under the stars he sighted a dim mass moving upward, heard the scrape of feet and mutter of low voices. Laughing to himself, he waited momentarily, then poured a hail of bullets into the dark mass of men. When he ceased firing, only dead or wounded men remained on the trail; below, far below, the seaman's voice of Dias rang like a clarion.

After this there fell silence; while from the cactus thickets around the crown of rocks came occasional voices that told of new arrivals from the harbor. Now and again a rifle was fired, though the four white men made no response, and the Yaquis, sure of their prey, were not anxious to hasten the event; indeed, they could do little until Dias and his men from the arroyo could gain the upper level by a roundabout way. So the five fugitives waited for the end, making a full meal on the provisions they had brought, and Frenchy found a canteen on a dead Yaqui which provided a few swallows of water all around.

"So this is the end of it all!" said Nelly Barnes, as she sat hand in hand with Dick Hampton, watching the eastern sky slowly lighten with the dawn. "This is the end—and what a sordid thing it has been all along, with the greed of that man Dias behind everything! It is hard to realize how everybody was deceived; oh, do you remember that day in Beverly, Dick, when the company marched down to the wharf, and the speeches and songs——"

"And where is the company now?" broke in Hampton, with a grim laugh. "It's dead, or fever-stricken, or heading back home—and its money is in the pocket of Dias. Did he get all of yours, Nelly?"

"Yes," she said. "He kept promising to take me on to San Francisco from here. Well, no use looking backward now, Dick! How long have we before—before the end?"

"Not long," and Hampton glanced at the rapidly lightening sky. "They'll rush us once or twice, then pour bullets into us and get it over."

"Then kiss me goodby now, Dick," she said quietly. "I'm saving one of these revolvers for myself—and they shan't capture me. We'll go together, Dick."

"Right, Nelly," he answered, and their lips met.

"Come alive, Dick!" sounded Eli's voice. "Looks like they're on us!"

A last kiss, and Hampton sprang to his place. The crown of rocks was surrounded by rough and cactus-covered ground, but had the advantage of dominating position; from it, Hampton could see far over the desert on all three sides. Behind was the gulf of the arroyo. Eli pointed to a dark crowd of men, beyond rifle-shot, off to the right.

"Now they're splitting up," he said. "Working out around us, eh? And look yonder, toward the sea—ain't that another gang?"

Hampton looked down the trail toward the harbor and thought that he made out shadowy moving objects. He shrugged.

"The crew of the schooner coming up. Well, get to your place, Eli—and goodby."

"Goodby, Dick."

A rifle-ball whistled between them as they separated. Pap Hoskins answered it, uttered a jubilant whoop, and the game was on.

A stern enough game it was, as Hampton discovered, and one at which he was a poor player. From the surrounding brush, boulders and cactus thickets, bullets were poured in at the crown of rocks; so thick and fast they came that to answer them was impossible, every least exposure drawing a hail of lead. Under cover of this fire, the Yaquis moved forward, gathered for a rush, and finally burst from cover with a yell.

The yell changed to a wild scream, however, as the four white men emptied rifles and revolvers into them, maintaining a stream of bullets. Astounded and dismayed, man after man plunging down, the Yaquis broke and scattered, and then spread out under cover to recommence their dropping fire. Frenchy brayed exultantly, Pap Hoskins whooped, and Nelly Barnes flitted from one to another, reloading the emptied weapons.

"They won't try that again!" yelled Eli, and his rifle banged. "Head down, Dick!"

Try it again they did not, but began to pour a searching, deadly fire into the crown of rocks. Hampton dared not show himself to shoot—the movement of a hand brought a dozen bullets. Hoskins, however, was more at home in this sort of work, and his rifle was deadly; while Eli and Frenchy manifested a reckless abandon which dropped more than one Yaqui.

Meantime, the spears of dawn had ripped asunder the gray veil of the eastern sky, and the sun was up, a red ball of fire mounting the brazen heavens. Hampton looked toward the harbor trail, but could see nothing more of the schooner's crew—they had taken warning and were advancing under cover, no doubt. Suddenly Hampton, who was on the right of the rocky crown, was startled by a yell from Eli.

"Look out, Dick—feller creepin' up on you! By that ocotillo bush——"

Hampton twisted about, peered forth at the clump of long, slender cactus spires, and presently caught a movement to one side of it. He fired. A Yaqui leaped into the air like a stricken deer, and fell motionless. Bullets stormed in — one of them raked across Hampton's head, sending the blood dripping into his eyes.

"Come on yere an' take Frenchy's place, Hampton!" yelled Pap Hoskins. "Move smart!"

Hampton scrambled across the crown of rocks, bullets spattering all around, to where Frenchy lay sprawled out with two bullets through his brain; the enemy were close in on this side, so close that Hampton could hear the rattle of displaced stones as the men scrambled. He caught up a revolver, leaped to his feet, and emptied the weapon. Two Yaquis lay quiet, and Hampton ducked to shelter unhurt as bullets flailed the air above him.

"Good work!" shouted Eli, from the left. "Hurray! I got one——"

The shout was cut short. Hampton, glancing around, saw Eli's figure leap up, whirl, and crumple out of sight. A shrill cry came from Nelly Barnes.

"Eli's shot, Dick!"

Hampton made no response. Pap Hoskins uttered a fierce yell; his red whiskers were blackened with powder and sweat, and his eyes glared wildly.

"It's all over!" he shouted, and then sent a laugh roaring up. He leaped to his feet, swinging a revolver in each hand, and disdaining all cover, began to fire at the brush around. As he did so, his voice leaped out in a shrill rendition of the golden song:

"Oh! California,
  That's the land for me!
I'm gwine to Sacramento
  With my wash bowl on my knee——"

His knees gave way suddenly, he flung out his arms, and with a last effort he fired a shot even as he fell; then he lay across the boulder in the hot sunlight, while bullets still thudded into his poor body. Pap Hoskins had found his golden land.

Hampton fired to right and left. The others were all gone now—he was conscious that Nelly Barnes was just behind him, reloading his revolvers. Then, from somewhere out ahead he heard the voice of Dias lifting sharply. He could not get the words, which were in the Yaqui patois, but the firing ceased. The bullets no longer came buzzing and whining, to spatter in bursts of lead on the hot rocks. He wiped the blood from his eyes and looked around.

"Hurt, Nelly?"

"No, Dick." She looked up at him, smiled bravely. "Eli isn't dead—I couldn't do anything for him though——"

"No matter. It'll be over in a minute now," said Hampton. "The main thing is not to let 'em get us alive. Goodby, dear girl——"

Something flickered through the high air like a falling snake; another followed, and another. Hampton leaped to his feet, lunging in every direction, crying frantic oaths, firing in blind desperation at men he could not see. The nooses had settled about him, the thin, harsh ropes of maguey fiber drew taut; beside him Nelly Barnes writhed and twisted in another noose.

Dark shapes appeared—Yaquis, laughing, who flung themselves in upon the two. Hampton emptied his revolver as he was jerked back and forth, knew that one and another of the Indians had fallen, heard another shot beside him as Nelly Barnes fired pointblank at an assailant. The ropes dragged him down, brown men leaped on him, held him helpless; he was bound hand and foot and jerked out from among the boulders, out from the mass of rocks crowning the eminence, to where Dias stood in the sunlight, on the wide platform above the trail. Here in this empty space Hampton was propped upright to stand as best he could on bound feet; here Nelly Barnes, bound likewise, was dragged to stand beside him; and here Eli, ragged shirt covered with blood but alive and conscious, was dragged and flung down in the sand.

"The others are dead, *mi señor amo*," said one of the guards.

Dias nodded, and rolled a *cigarito*, and smiled slightly as he met Hampton's eyes. He did not speak, however, for a little space. The Yaquis assembled, until Hampton realized that two-score and more of them were crowded around.

Dias lighted his *cigarito*. He was about to speak, when a man came running up the trail, panting, chattering out a shrill message as he came. It was a Chinaman from the cañon below.

There was no need to ask what message the yellow man brought, however. From the arroyo ascended a sudden outburst of sound—the howling of men, a shot or two, the long shriek of women in mortal fear, stabbing Yaqui yells; an indescribably frightful tumult of voices, over which rose and rose that bestial howling. Excited cries burst from the Yaqui around. Every man there knew instantly that the slaves had broken out. Dias turned to the brown men.

"Go and look after your families," he ordered. "Five of you remain here. Slay those fools who have forgotten themselves. Go! Guard the señora."

Ere he had finished speaking, the impatient Yaquis were melting away down the trail. More shots came from below. The panting Chinaman babbled out something about the slaves, and Dias hurled an oath at him. He sought the shade of a big cardone cactus at the edge of the clearing.

"So you're not dead, *El Bobo?*" Dias looked down at Eli, and smiled. Then his eyes lifted to Hampton's unfaltering gaze. "Well, the two of you fooled me neatly. And you struck me a good blow last night. Which of you left Ramon a blind wreck?"

"I," said Hampton, cheerfully enough. "I'm sorry it was not you instead, you dog!"

"You'll be sorrier before long," and Dias chuckled. Then a word from one of the Yaquis, a low word of astounded wonder, caused him to turn. Toward the group, from the edge of the platform, staggering toward them with outstretched hands and horrible face, was the Chinaman. Halfway to the group, his mouth open and gaping yet uttering no sound, he halted, beat at the air with his yellow hands, and then plunged forward. He lay on his face in the dust, dead, and from his back protruded something that glittered in the morning sunlight.

Dias was the first man to move. An astounded oath broke from him. He stepped forward, went to the dead Chinaman, and stooped. He came erect holding that glittering object in his hand. His gaze whipped to Hampton in blank amazement, then darted at the desert around.

The object that he held was the silver-hafted knife.

"Oh! California,
  We'll see you bye and bye,
And if we forget Beverly
  Why bless you, don't you cry!"

THAT was the strangest sound that had ever echoed up from the Valley of Mercy—that sound of men's voices roaring out the lilting air of "Susannah" above the crack of rifle-shots and the stabbing yells of Yaquis. The sound itself, and what it portended, held Dias motionless for an instant—then from the edge of the clearing leaped a long, naked brown figure that came for him like a snake darting for a rabbit.

It was El Hambre.

"Injun does it!" shrilled up the voice of Job Warlock, as Indian and Dias went down in the dust. The Yaquis swung around, but too late—there was a ragged crack of rifles, a burst of revolver-fire, and the five brown men remained sprawled out in the sunlight. Hampton, to whom all this seemed a dream inchoate, visioned half a dozen men, white men, springing forward across the platform, while Job Warlock darted upon him with a yell of delight. Small wonder that Nelly Barnes uttered one wild cry and pitched forward senseless across the recumbent figure of Eli.

"You, Job—you!" stammered Hampton, as Warlock grinned in his face and then stooped to slit his lashings. Another white man came leaping toward him. "Adam Johnson! It can't be—this is some hallucination——"

"—— a bit, Dick Hampton!" cried Adam Johnson. "Give us your fist, lad—ah! There's a fiend unleashed in that brown Injun! Look at him, now——"

Everything else forgotten, all stared; even Hampton, oblivious of his freedom or of the fainting girl at his feet, looked at the scene which was transpiring before his eyes.

Dias lay upon his back there in the hot sand, and upon him the lean Indian half-sat, half-knelt. Dias had driven that long silver knife through and through El Hambre, from breast to back, and clutched the haft with both hands, powerless to draw it forth again—for the brown fingers of the Indian were in his throat. From El Hambre's lips burst his harsh, mirthless laugh; then he slowly bowed forward, slowly sank down, until his dying body covered the figure of his victim, his scarlet serape more vivid than blood in the sunlight. The legs of Dias twitched slightly, then were quiet.

"No use lookin' at the Injun," said Job Warlock. "Durned if Dias didn't split his heart first crack! Well, that's the end—give's your fist, Dick Hampton! Who's this in the dirt?"

The tension broken, the others were around him now, Adam Johnson and other men of the Beverly company; shaking his hand, pounding his back, crying out glad words. Some drew Nelly Barnes to one side, others cut Eli's bonds and shouted his name aloud as they recognized him; the hot, sun-smitten rock platform resounded to laughing, exulting words and eager cries, and the dead men who lay like blots in the white sunlight were forgotten.

"But what does it mean?" Hampton stared around helplessly at Nelly Barnes, who was being revived, at Eli, who was sitting up and grinning, at the men whom he knew so well who stood before him. "It's incredible that you're here, Job Warlock, and these others——"

"Not a bit," said Adam Johnson, and laughed happily. "Warlock and the Injun got ashore and told us what had happened. So we took a vote on it, and twenty of the company decided to come along to San Francisco; then we joined about fifteen New York men to our crowd."

"But—how the —— did you get here?" demanded Hampton.

The men around grinned delightedly. None of them paid any heed to the sounds that were coming up from the arroyo—the intermittent crack of rifles, the occasional lusty shout from Yankee throat, the still continuous howling of the slaves who were free.

"Get here?" Adam Johnson chuckled. "Warlock knew that Dias' schooner, or rather his wife's schooner, was due from the south, so we all went out in the boats of some Injun fishermen and met her. That's all there was to it. We piled aboard, chucked Dias' men into the boats, and set sail for the north. Piracy? Tut, tut! Who's to lay a charge against us, eh? We got in late last night, took the other schooner lying in port, and El Hambre explored. He came back this morning with word of the shooting here, so a few of us came this way to capture the trail-head, while the others marched around and up into the arroyo. And that's all of it. From the sound of things down below—ah! Miss Nelly, a glad good morning to you!"

Johnson swept off his hat. Nelly Barnes, staring around, came to Hampton's side and stood in blank wonder. Job Warlock scraped and grinned delightedly, and shook his gold ear-hoops. A sudden cry broke from the girl.

"Oh, it's true, it's true! Really you after all——"

"Aye, Nelly," and Hampton swept his arm around her, drawing her close to him. "Aye, it's the mercy of God at work—ah, Eli! Here's my brother, Adam Johnson! You remember him? Not hurt badly, Eli?"

"Nothing but a scrape over the ribs." Eli laughed, and then was engulfed by the eager men. Hampton was about to speak when Job Warlock turned to him suddenly.

"Dick! Where's that —— Doña Hermana?"

Hampton shook his head. Then he felt the girl tremble against his side—her face lifted, and a sudden frightened cry burst from her.

"Look—look there! Quickly!"

The knot of men disintegrated, whirled. Turning, Hampton saw a number of figures leaping up the trail from below, queer frightened figures, whose wild panting cries reechoed from the rocky walls. Two or three of the white men fired, and at this the figures screamed and turned again. They were Chinamen.

Now there swelled up a frightful and horrible sound which held the white men staring and spellbound. It was the mad screaming of men, the bestial howling of men mad with liquor, with hatred, with blood-lust. It mounted up along the trail, rising in a shrill crescendo of such unutterable fury that those on the platform stood waiting for that unseen horror to appear, the very hearts frozen within them by the awful outburst of shrieks. A shot burst through that tumult, and another, but the voices only swelled up louder.

"Back, everybody!" cried Hampton suddenly. "It's the slaves—they're loose. No telling what may happen—back to cover, men!"

He tried to get Nelly Barnes back toward the rocks, but a low cry broke from her, and her arm swept up. Hampton followed that pointing gesture, and then swung the girl aside that she might see no more. A low oath burst from him, was echoed from those around.

Into sight on the narrow trail came two of the Chinamen, and at their heels was a great wave of half-naked men — the Mexican slaves from below, now become wild and ravening beasts. They dragged down the two yellow men, poured over them, then suddenly the wave split asunder at another burst of shots. There in the midst of them all stood Doña Hermana, distinct in the white sunlight; she was bare-headed, her hair flying wildly, the clothes half-stripped from her body, a revolver in her hand. It spoke again—then the wave rolled upon her. From the peons swept up that hoarse and frightful yell; their bestial, foaming faces closed in upon the woman, their claws tore at her and tore again. She stood an instant under that wave, her white shoulders leaping into scarlet streaks—then she disappeared, and the crested billow of men rolled above her, the stabbing shriek of her voice piercing once or twice through the horrible screaming exultancy of those human wolves.

Mad oaths burst from the white men. Rifles swept up, revolvers began to crack. Bullets thudded into that writhing mass of humanity and shredded it apart. The blind screams of rage and fury became frantic yells of fear — the peons fell away, thinned out, turned and vanished down the trail again, leaving a red heap behind them. Job Warlock ran forward to look at that heap, but presently he came back again in ghastly pallor. He mutely shook his head, wiped the sweat from his face and collapsed on a boulder, staring at the ground.

"Well, well," said Adam Johnson nervously, "I don't know what——"

"Don't worry about it," spoke up Eli. "That was Doña Hermana—the wife of Dias. I guess those peons sort of evened things up. Now what, Adam? You fellers goin' down below?"

"I'll have to," said Adam Johnson with a grimace. "All's clear at the harbor, Hampton; you might go that way with Miss Nelly. Here, two o' you boys come with me, the rest of you go along to the harbor. Make sure o' those schooners. See you later, Hampton."

He strode away down the trail, two of the Beverly men at his heels. Job Warlock came to his feet and looked at Hampton.

"The world's a good place, so hurray!" he exclaimed, though soberly enough. "Well, what are we waitin' for? Looks like all our friends are goin' on to San Francisco, Dick. What course are you and me goin' to set?"

Hampton smiled. He met Eli's beaming face, then turned and nodded to the eager gaze of the girl at his side.

"Which way, Nelly? Together?"

"Always together, Dick!" She smiled as her fingers gripped his. "Always together——"

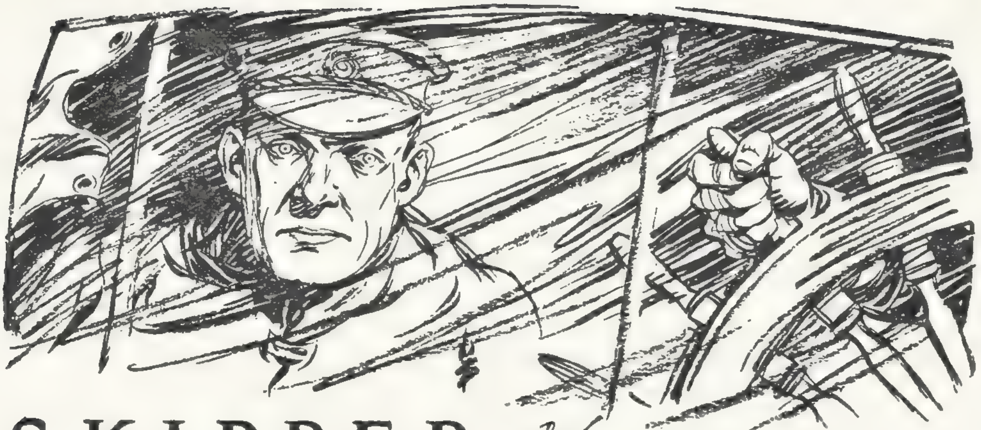
"Set the course for 'Frisco, Job!" said Hampton.

Job Warlock touched his forelock.

"Aye, aye, sir! North it is, once out o' this gulf—it's a far ways to them Bluenose ships, but Injun does it—aye, sir, north it is. Come along, all hands!"

Hampton, tucking Nelly's arm in his, turned with the others to the harbor trail. Then, as though in presage of the future, from the arroyo below rang up the slow-lilting, sharply accented air of "Susannah," roared out by a score and more of exultant New England voices:

"Oh, Sacramento,
  That's the place for me!
Our troubles all are over
And in 'Frisco soon we'll be!"



SKIPPER

by RICHARD C·GILL

THE Old Man was obviously worried, and that, to the nervous and apprehensive crew, was the ultimate sign of approaching catastrophe. Skippers, of course, are usually worried about one thing or another, but they never show it, not even to their first mates. And, according to those whose privilege it is to associate with the mighty, the first mate and the Old Man vibrate in almost the same plane. Hence, when even the A.B. at the wheel was able to discern the skipper's anxiety, and later broadcast the news, the entire crew got jumpy, and didn't care who knew it.

Every man off watch was on deck, simply because he should have been below. If the bosun had gone aft to turn out the crew to do some work on deck in this heavy weather, when evil black waves swept the whole ship and meant a crushing, gasping death for any one who was not quick enough to find a handhold, there would have been a near mutiny. But now, with the simple perverseness of men who go to sea, the crew was gathered in rapt groups of three or four wherever there was shelter, on the poop that rose and fell like the end of a seesaw, on the after well deck that was dangerously swept with sea after sea, or balancing on the edge of the mess table next to the galley.

Even Sparks, the radio operator—a nice boy who wrote home to tell his mother of seafaring iniquities at every opportunity—hung over the midships rail, and gazed at the inscrutable sea, with its mask torn off, exposing hissing, tormented furrows of gray water, mightier than steel, that rolled scornfully by into infinity. He was pale and desolate, and struggled with a numbing, vague panic.

It was his first trip, a summer vacation job, and he hated it. He ate in the officers' mess and had expected uniformed gentlemen who would talk of understandable things, shaded, possibly, by a certain rather coarse wit. Instead he found men, without uniforms, who ate silently and efficiently; who, when they did talk, spoke only of the ship, their ship that they were driving from port to port. They illustrated their ideas by oaths that he did not at first understand, and that sickened him later.

He had read about these men, but had not believed in them. They rather took away the romance of the sea, that he had expected to find. For instance, he could never fathom just why the first mate should say, "—— it, son, this is a good ship," and take away a sailor's paint brush, and spot a rivet himself. But then in justice to Sparks, his lack of understanding really was not his fault. Not everybody should go to sea.

Meanwhile, while Sparks was learning to hate the sea, the Old Man paced the flying bridge. Lean bodied, tall and stooped, leaner of face, he looked like an ideal captain, and he was nearly that. For sixteen years he had been to sea, and had held his master's ticket two years. Only thirty-four, he was senior captain in his company, and next in line for a shore post at the end of this trip. That was something his wife didn't know as yet, but then he was the sort of man who never tells a good thing in advance, not when he could "surprize the little lady, Mr. Hawkins," as he would tell the third mate during the eight to twelve watch. He loved her as he loved ships, and men and oceans which was a great deal.

Now he suddenly stopped his pacing, and standing behind the flapping canvas wind-dodger, regarded the northwest seas that thundered against the bow of the vessel, dropping tons of sea water on the foc'sle head, which ran off in a Niagara on to the deck, and sloshed heavily back to the forward bulkhead amidships, burying the entire bow.

Something always caught in the skipper's chest when he saw green water where the anchor winch should have been. He had to get her back!

Grunting at the lookout, he climbed down the starboard ladder, and entered the wheelhouse. He needed to talk to some one. A peculiar trait in a lean-faced sailor, but he addressed himself without preamble to the first and third officers who were there together.

"Ever been in a hurricane, Mr. Hawkins? I mean a real one, a hundred and forty mile an hour one?"

Mr. Hawkins confessed that he had had the good fortune, so far in his career, to avoid them, but once let him say, he had almost—

"Well· I have. Had a tanker in '19, when the big blow swept the Gulf out clean. Thought I was never coming through. Had her closed up tight, but my ——, she'd lift right up out of the water. H'm. I'll never forget it. Heard the S.O.S. of that Spiggoty mail ship that went down in the Yucatan Straits with over five hundred. I couldn't do a thing. Why, they'd keep finding those poor —— on the beach for months after—till clear into '20. H'm. I tell you, Mr. Hawkins, as I stand here now, if my own company told me to take this ship through a hurricane tomorrow, why I'd resign my job, I'd give up my ticket, and I've got a family that lives on that ticket. I'd give up that shore job I've got coming, and starve on a farm. And now, by ——, we're going to have one, and can't help it. See that long, narrow cloud, shaped like the doctor's bread knife, pointing north? Well—you'll have one hundred and twenty miles an hour this time tomorrow. It says so. And that's —— on my last trip."

And so the Old Man talked. When the second came on at midnight, he was still there, waiting—and he felt alone—to pit himself against the utmost wrath of gods, and bring his ship back again to the eyes of men.

II

BY THIS time the sea was worse, the wind had increased, and preparations were made for the inevitable hurricane. The radio had ceased to function some hours before, so there was no possibility of avoiding the blow by running according to storm signals. It was due to arrive in a matter of minutes.

The day crew had been battened down aft, and were already praying, or swearing, or sleeping. The entire black gang was below in the engine room, suffering their unsung agony of awaiting unseen, inexorable disaster.

In the wheelhouse the storm ports had been put up on the windows, and on all, save the windows in front of the wheel, signal flags had been tacked to keep the glass splinters from flying inward, should an outside port be blown in. All the cargo ventilators had been plugged with wood and battened down with canvas tops. Six A.B.'s were called up in the chart room adjoining, and held for relief.

Then the whole ship waited.

III

ALMOST exactly at eight bells in the morning watch the hurricane struck the Old Man's ship.

Within the space of a minute, the wind had increased from gale force to one hundred and twenty miles an hour. Its very suddenness, like the peevish slap of an angry sea-god, was numbing. The seas were flattened momentarily, even the flying tops of waves ceased scudding through the air. As if a siren were turned on, whose Banshee shriek filled the whole low, black arch of the zenith, so there began a moaning which rose to a screaming, senseless, murderous thunder, which in turn gave way to a continuous, paralyzing shriek, at times almost too high for the ear to catch. Then, once more, the seas piled up, black and gray craggy mountains that rose higher and higher. Tons of water in a mass would detach themselves from the top of a wave and hurtle through the storm. When they struck the ship, they did damage. The boats went first, helped along by a half dozen barrels of oil that had been lashed to the engine-room grating.

Sort of a silly joke, Mr. Hawkins thought, couldn't use them now anyway!

Inside the wheelhouse, there was a curious quiet, and an extremely high atmospheric pressure. The skipper's ears rang; he thought his nose would bleed; his mouth was dry and tasted of salt; and he could barely lift his feet as he held on to the rail.

Day was proclaimed by a grayness that made the fury outside all the more appalling. Finally the plunging foc'sle head, thirty yards away, was visible, and as the skipper made it out, he groaned — almost. He turned to the A.B.'s who sat silent on the deck, staring at nothing, stunned by the aphasic wind. Their mouths were open slightly, and they did not move till the captain had finished speaking.

"Look alive, you, Berry, Petro, and you Svenska, there. Come on, the three of you. The cap's off the for'd ventilator for number one hold; —— knows how long—and another's got to be put on—or we'll fill up for'd. The bosun put a couple extra ones in the mess room. Fix it; and I hope one of you can get there. Lively, now!"

Not a great deal of sentiment about sending a man out to die horribly in a gray hell like that! But they got up; and as languidly, as if told to *suji* the mess room on a warm, calm day. They were sailors.

Svenska dived down the 'way to the mess room and came back with the round, wooden plug. Without even the usual "Yes, sir," Berry, leading the other two, forced open the port wheelhouse door enough to slide through, and the door slammed sharply on his scream, heard faintly, though he was but a few feet away.

The skipper swayed to the side of the house, and tore down the flag from the nearest window. Pressing his face to the thick glass, he peered through the outside port into the dark of the storm. As he did so, Berry's white face, six inches away, gasping, with death upon him, slowly passed the captain's range of vision. He was spread-eagled, flat against the smooth steel side of the house, and was being forced to the rear rail of the bridge deck by the sheer force of the wind.

Slowly he moved, and desperately he fought, grasping rivet heads and plate intersections, but the hurricane won easily. It seemed that he gave up the struggle, for he at once tripped back a few paces, as grotesquely dainty as if he were attempting a dance with the wind, hit the waist high rail, and executed a very neat back somersault, landing heavily on his feet on the midships deck, a dozen feet below.

Dazed and shocked, he was pushed back again for a few more ghastly, mocking, mincing steps, till a gray wraith of flying water lifted itself from the sea beside the ship, and swept across the deck; and when it had passed over, Berry was no longer there. The whole thing was much the same as an angry school teacher erasing with one stroke from a blackboard the written insolence of a child.

The ventilator still had to be capped, and Svenska and Petro made a successful dash for the top of the ladder, descended to the deck, and thence to the well deck.

Came the struggle along the edge of the port bulwark to the foc'sle head. Pounded by tons of water, thrown cruelly against steel, cut, and all but drowned, they arrived, after a mercifully dim nightmare of combat, at the ventilator. Somehow they capped it; and, as if waiting, the bow took a sudden dive, far down, and buried itself.

Green water rushed over Petro, swept him back against the railing, and held him there, forever it seemed. It rushed past his ears, roaring, filled his mouth and nostrils, burning and choking him. He felt his eyes bulge, until, after centuries, the bow came up, and the stinging slap of the cold wind brought him suddenly into complete consciousness. He looked for Svenska, and when he saw only Svenska's finger, caught somehow in a wing nut on the ventilator, he didn't care to bother to fight his way back. Nor did he. As carelessly as if he were walking down a country road, he sauntered crazily through the clutching blackness of the hurricane, and entered the wheelhouse, seeing nothing, and unable to even realize that he had come back from a passage with death. Without a word he resumed his place on the deck, staring, his mouth open slightly.

The man at the wheel, who was his friend and bunkmate, had fainted from the strain of watching the struggle. Another A.B. now tried to keep the ship's nose headed into the storm. That was all there was to do.

IV

TWENTY-FOUR hours later the skipper, pale and sick, and horribly dizzy from the continuous shriek of the wind and the tremendous pressure, announced to the first officer that they were on the edge of the storm center, and that the end was coming. The wind kept constantly shifting, and had just ripped off the strongbacks from the two forward hatches, so making the ship like a tin can without a top, thrown into a turbulent stream.

The seas were no longer steady, thundering mountains of water; they were cruel, sudden upliftings of an ocean in agony, that dealt unexpected blows from unexpected angles, and kept the ship pretty low and rolling more heavily, awash without cessation.

Sparks, who had also been in the wheelhouse, had reached the limit of his endurance and was sprawled on the deck, rolling violently from side to side, endeavoring to play with a pair of parallel rulers, and talking quite cheerfully with his mother.

The man at the wheel was intent upon the compass, watching it sway in its binnacle housing; it was affording him great amusement. He had watched it thus for twenty-four hours without moving, save to smile foolishly when it dipped more than usual.

The geyser-like waves grew higher, the wind plucked more furiously at the shell of a steamer, and the vessel itself shuddered at every uncouth touch, and plunged despairingly on into the screaming gray.

The skipper, still gripping the rail, wondered with a mild curiosity just how much longer he would be able to breathe, if his throat continued to contract, and just why his ear drums did not burst inward. He thought of his wife, and his promised position, but mainly he regretted, to the very soul of him, that he would not be able to bring his ship back to the company, his fetish. He was nearly an ideal captain.

Slants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

Gumps

BETTER—better—better—a man can't be satisfied, can he? No satisfaction to a man as long as he is not going up-hill. It's no end of a hard job to be a man—what with aches and pains and things of one sort and another.

There is the eternal rub— "You are a man—*show 'em.*"

And yet—with all of that there is also the knowledge that no man who imagines himself to be better than the rest of the gang is quite a man.

I detest those stuck-up birds, don't you?

People who say—

"Look, here, this is the way to go about it."

I like a guy who will stick his arm through mine and say—

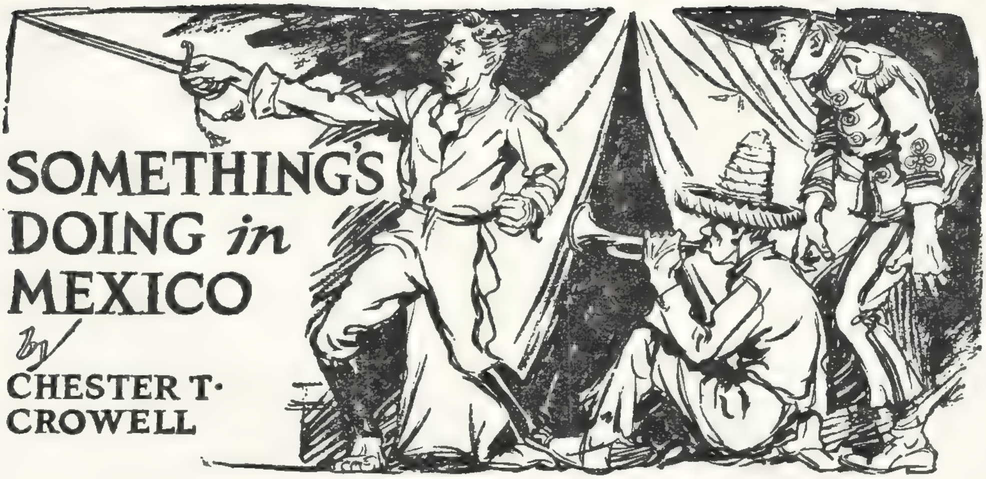
"Bill you're a darned old fool but I'm another—come on—*let's show 'em.*"

I like a lot of things—apple-pie, gingerbread, the first flower when Spring runs from the hills and all across the meadows, a pretty girl, ham and eggs, a comfortable seat by a good fire, or a well-cooked gump in the jungles—any old place where a man can lie down and sleep is the place for me. Ain't that so?

Do you know what a gump is? It is what tramps—who are really the only truly cultured people—call a chicken.

SOMETHING'S DOING *in* MEXICO

by CHESTER T. CROWELL



Author of "Uncle Dudley Kinda Scouts Round," "Jack and Louis Invent," etc.

"CARLOAD of freight for you on the siding this morning, Uncle Dudley," Sam Tupper announced immediately after they had greeted each other and joined the hurrying throng of six persons who formally opened Santa Maria each morning.

The daily rush of morning traffic along Main Street was produced by the cashier and assistant cashier of the bank; the postmistress, the proprietor of the general store, ditto of the hardware store, and the station agent. These six in addition to Zachariah Beadle, familiarly known as Uncle Dudley, and his young assistant, Sam Tupper, constituted the business element or as London might say, the middle class of Santa Maria, Texas.

Since Main Street was only three blocks long, the sudden appearance of eight persons all going in the same direction was something of an event even if it did occur daily. In a way—and quite properly—this event was associated with the dawn, and the calendar.

At the mention of a carload of freight Uncle Dudley's face clouded, and Sam wondered if his superior had possibly embarked upon a speculation which was not prospering. It was difficult to say just what a carload of freight might imply, because of the wide range of Uncle Dudley's business activities.

He was a ranchman, dealer in real estate, ranches and farms, buyer and seller of wool, hides and cotton, occasional importer of pecans, limes and dried red pepper, former county judge and at present political boss, notary public and attorney. It will therefore be more or less clear that Sam Tupper didn't know exactly what the box car might contain. Working for Uncle Dudley as his confidential lieutenant was not without excitement and pleasant uncertainty.

On a Tuesday, for instance, one might be loading bales of cotton on to a flat car; on Wednesday acting as presiding officer in an election booth; on Thursday as witness in a trial, and on Friday as auctioneer of cattle or horses obtained by foreclosure. Sam was fortunately not fond of regularity and routine. So he liked his job.

Observing that mention of the carload of freight failed to bring joy to Uncle Dudley he decided to change the subject, though it was difficult for him to understand the failure of that first remark. On a single-track line of railroad the actual and visible arrival of a carload of tangible freight is always exciting. Sam had enjoyed a hearty breakfast of two catfish fried with crisp bacon, hot biscuits, molasses and three cups of black coffee. He simply had to share his good feeling with some one.

"I was down to the Rio Grande last night, fishing," he said. "There was campfires, millions of them, on the other side. Something's doing in Mexico, I think."

Uncle Dudley seemed positively pained by this harmless statement, so Sam gave up and they walked the remaining block to the office in silence.

The office was a large one-room structure of corrugated iron over a wooden framework, with a door in front and a window in the rear. A large pineboard table was its principal furnishing.

Uncle Dudley unlocked the door and entered, followed by Sam whose eyes opened wide when he observed a Mexican in military uniform asleep on the table. It was a most remarkable uniform of dark greenish-blue decorated with scarlet stripes and gold braid. A black patent-leather belt which was worn outside the coat had attached to it two bulging pistol holsters and a sword.

The Mexican was awakened by the noise and rose hurriedly from his improvised bed. A second later he had drawn himself to his full height of five feet and four inches and was busy examining his pointed mustaches with his fingers. Sam judged that this was a very important feature of his morning toilet.

Uncle Dudley's six feet of leanness towered over the little man while Sam Tupper, stout and heavy muscled, looked in comparison very much like a blond bear. Out of courtesy to the visitor the ensuing conversation was in the Spanish language.

"Did you sleep well?" Uncle Dudley asked.

The visitor said he did, but he was rubbing his back and screwing up his face as he said it. Also he examined Sam uneasily.

"Allow me to present Mr. Samuel Tupper, my assistant," said Uncle Dudley. "Sam, this is General Juan Jesus Cassiano."

Sam nodded and General Cassiano bowed.

"General Cassiano is commander-in-chief of the military forces of the provisional constitutional government of the Republic of the United States of Mexico," Uncle Dudley continued.

The general seemed pleased to hear the full title used. Sam judged—and correctly—that there was business afoot.

"And now, Sam, I would like for you to step over to the O. K. Eating House and get the general a beefsteak or something for breakfast. Don't forget a pot of coffee. And while they are cooking it, get the papers on that car of freight."

FIFTEEN minutes later Sam returned with a sandwich and a pot of coffee. The sandwich was cleverly constructed by slicing a loaf of bread down the middle and wedging into it one round steak, fried to a crisp.

General Cassiano thanked the messenger then thanked Uncle Dudley, then excused himself to both for sitting down, and proceeded to breakfast.

"How is the car billed?" Uncle Dudley asked.

"Rock salt," Sam replied.

His employer smiled.

"Very good," was his comment. "Tonight we will move that rock salt to the camp across the river. I have ordered five large trucks up from the ranch tonight. They will arrive about eleven o'clock. We will take everything in one trip."

"What is it?" Sam asked.

"Mostly cartridges," Uncle Dudley informed him, "but there are also two machine guns."

"Oh," Sam grunted, displeased with himself for being so stupid.

Whenever there were revolutions in Mexico Uncle Dudley did a little gunrunning as a sideline. Sam was thoroughly familiar with the technique and details of these operations and now wondered what was the matter with his wits; rock salt nearly always meant a revolution in Mexico.

The Rio Grande could be forded about four miles from Santa Maria. This fact was unimportant to international commerce, but whenever a revolution was in progress the "outs" hastened to occupy a hill in front of the ford. Later the "ins" or federal troops would arrive and attempt to dislodge them. If the two forces met unexpectedly a battle generally ensued. If one force was very much larger than the other the weaker force generally joined the larger force and all went fishing.

Catfish were plentiful thereabouts. The place was very important to such civil war as Mexico enjoyed. It was marked on all military maps of the country as strategic. And even Sam so regarded it, having also caught some excellent fish there.

"Have you any one who can set up those machine guns?" General Cassiano asked.

"No, I haven't, General," Uncle Dudley replied.

"Why haven't you?" Sam interrupted, smiling. "Uncle Dudley, when I was in France they taught us to assemble a machine-gun blindfolded. You just show me that machine gun and I'll make it call me papa."

"The general will be very glad to pay

you for your services," Uncle Dudley announced with a bow in the direction of the resplendent uniform.

At the same time Uncle Dudley did some rapid finger gymnastics impossible to describe and intelligible only to Sam Tupper. Suffice it to say that he was thus advised to charge fifty dollars and promptly accepted the advice.

Sam Tupper spent a malodorous day examining and counting hides in the little warehouse adjoining the office of his chief. He knocked off work an hour or so early and adjourned to his home for food, but mainly for untainted air and a little nap, to fortify him for the night's activities.

Promptly at eleven o'clock five large automobile trucks surrounded the box car described in the bill of lading as a container of rock salt. The drivers, ably assisted by Sam Tupper, transferred cases of cartridges and the larger boxes containing two machine guns. Several persons saw the work in progress but gave it not a second thought. There was nothing unusual in Santa Maria about the selection of a moonlight night for such heavy labor. It was cooler. Moreover the trucks might be urgently needed during the day for some other form of work on the ranch.

General Juan Jesus Cassiano, concealed in the box car, checked the cases as they were removed and Uncle Dudley checked the general's checking. They exuded politeness with every syllable, but nothing was overlooked by either. In short, that car of rock salt was inspected grain by grain.

Diplomatic relations trembled on the brink for a few seconds when Uncle Dudley suggested that the cash be delivered into his hands before the automobiles started toward the river. Simply as a matter of etiquette General Cassiano thought the correct procedure was for the cash to be delivered just as soon as the cartridges, or rock salt, had been laid down on the Mexican side.

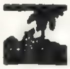
It is difficult for an outsider to pass judgment upon the niceties of this situation or to judge the arguments of either party so they may as well be omitted.

Uncle Dudley played his trump card when he declined to give the order for the trucks to proceed. General Cassiano thereupon bowed gracefully to the inevitable and produced the cash which was also checked with meticulous care.

At this point Sam Tupper was guilty of a social error. He suggested, quite casually, that this was a most appropriate time to pay him fifty dollars for setting up the machine guns.

However, the machine guns were not yet assembled. Moreover General Cassiano had brought exactly the required amount of cash to pay for munitions and had none remaining for the employment of experts. It would be necessary, he explained, for Sam to proceed to the camp in order to assemble the guns and there the funds necessary for his payment would be found.

This sounded reasonable to Sam so the procession set out. Uncle Dudley was the only member of the party remaining behind. He returned to his office, locked his funds in an ancient mound of cast iron to which he referred as a safe, and repaired to his home.



SIX inches of dust ground as fine as tooth powder acts very much like a velvet cushion on a dirt road, so the trucks, going down grade most of the way, made scarcely any noise at all. Under a cover of gray dust completely concealing paint they looked more like the ghosts of trucks as they moved silently through the moonlight.

One hour later the gallant recruits who gave allegiance to General Juan Jesus Cassiano were busy unloading cases of cartridges while the lordly American truck drivers were the guests of the general and partakers with him of the contents of a bottle of tequila, a form of liquid fire popular south of the Rio Grande.

Having discussed the prospects of this revolution, along with the tequila, the five drivers accepted General Cassiano's invitation to watch Sam Tupper assemble a machine gun. Sam was for taking the thing to a dark place where he could show off, but the audience demanded that he remain near a camp-fire where they could see.

His company in France, like many others, had been taught to handle their implements of war by the touch system, so that they could make adjustments or repairs in the trenches without the need of a light. He discovered that he was dealing with two machines of precisely the type he was accustomed to and did not waste time wondering how Uncle Dudley came into possession of them.

Having given the audience a satisfactory demonstration of skill in the dim light of a camp-fire, he moved the second machine into the dark and assembled it there in about the same elapsed time required for the first. General Juan Jesus Cassiano was even more impressed than the five cowboys who were serving this evening as truck drivers.

Their complimentary remarks were cut short by the necessity for early departure but the general had other matters in mind.

"If you can operate an airplane," General Cassiano whispered to Sam Tupper, "I will pay you fifty thousand dollars to remain."

Now Sam was a machine gunner and by no means a flying man, but fifty thousand dollars is entirely too much money to be treated with contempt. Just out of respect for that sum he would like to negotiate a few minutes even though he would later have to say a reluctant "No."

"Where's the machine?" he asked confidently.

"It will be here in a few days," was the reply.

Almost anyone can be an aviator when not confronted with a machine. It was a fearful temptation to a person of the sporting proclivities of Sam Tupper.

"Sure I can run it," Sam said. "Just trot it out and I'll make it call me mama,"

"You will remain then?" General Cassiano asked.

"I sure will," Sam assured the commander.

His glance, however, wandered toward the river and he estimated the distance to its shore at not more than one hundred yards. Under the circumstances, why not? Sam had always wanted to be in the flying corps and here was his opportunity.

If he had one lingering uncertainty it would have disappeared a moment later.

"Come and I will provide your uniform," said General Cassiano.

Sam followed his commander to a large tent where many wooden boxes were piled, one on top of the other. General Cassiano opened a box and produced the uniform. The fascination of gold and scarlet braid is too well known to require further comment on the subject here.

In spite of the fact that Sam thought General Cassiano looked like something that pops out of a box when the spring is released, he was delighted to be attired in similar fashion, though less resplendent. Having little sartorial experience, Sam supposed the tight fit of his clothes was simply the military style.

The coat would not button, but he was glad of that because it made for comfort. The trousers ceased operations abruptly half an inch above his shoe tops but the garment was so tight in other places that he could not bend over to observe shortcomings in the vicinity of his ankles and remained ignorant of them.

Well pleased with himself, Sam went to bed on a saddle blanket, fully attired as were all the other soldiers, and began counting his wealth. If he could hold out a week or ten days he estimated that the pay ought to amount to not less than a thousand dollars even if fifty thousand were his annual salary. There was also the chance that fifty thousand dollars was his weekly salary—maybe it was daily!

Few men have gone to bed more brilliantly attired or facing brighter prospects. It was the happiest night of Sam's life. Only one cloud hung over it, namely, the possibility that Uncle Dudley might come after him and disgrace the uniform by dragging its wearer home by the ear.

However, he dismissed this possibility on the ground that the rebels have a playful habit of holding persons for ransom and they would not be likely to overlook such a juicy prospect as Uncle Dudley, who had so recently come into possession of a good round sum in American currency.

For five days Sam strutted, ate, drank, lolled about the camp, fraternized with generals, and slowly stretched his uniform to a point which made breathing a trifle less difficult. On the sixth day an automobile truck thundered into the camp carrying gloom in the form of an airplane.

But it was in pieces.

SAM sighed with relief. He was not a mechanician; hadn't pretended to be. Some one else would have to assemble this machine. But there was a tall, slender, blue-eyed young man sitting on the seat with the driver. He seemed to be in charge of operations. General Cassiano was summoned and greeted this young man.

A moment later Captain Samuel Tupper was introduced to Captain George Barnes.

It seemed that Captain Barnes was also an aviator. A light perspiration broke out on Sam's forehead during the introduction and he was puzzled by the fact that he felt uncomfortably cool at the same time. However, he volunteered to act as interpreter for Captain Barnes who spoke no Spanish.

A squad of soldiers, attired in white cotton pants, white cotton shirts, enormous conical straw hats, and rawhide sandals followed Captain Tupper's directions in removing the airplane from the truck. Sam examined it with the air of an expert, and said nothing.

"Can you assemble it?" he asked Barnes.

"I think so," Barnes replied.

"You *think* so!" Sam exclaimed.

"Well, you can help me out a little, can't you?" Barnes pleaded.

"I doubt it very much," Sam snapped. "I'm not a mechanician."

"Well, you ain't no aviator either," Barnes announced with some heat.

"How do *you* know?" Captain Tupper retorted, feeling a sudden attack of weakness which seemed to center in his stomach.

"I can tell by the looks of you," was the ungracious reply.

"If looks are what we're going by," Sam snapped back, "I'd say you ain't no ace neither."

Captain Barnes had been walking along by the side of the truck but at this remark stopped and appeared to be lost in thought. Finally he peered cautiously at Sam's face. Uncertainty must have been written high and wide on that open countenance for Captain Barnes at once reached a decision.

"Neither one of us is aviators, Buddy," he declared not unkindly. "What we better do is make a stab at getting this junk together and then find something wrong with it. What do you say?"

"Fair enough," Sam agreed.

Work was at once resumed. In a few minutes the various parts were all safely on the ground and the truck which brought them was kicking up a cloud of dust on its way back to the river. All that day Captain Barnes and Captain Tupper worked under a broiling sun trying to fathom the Chinese puzzle before them and making doubtful progress very slowly.

This process continued during the second, third and fourth days also. Both young men, however, had a natural aptitude for mechanics.

In fact by the close of the fourth day they began to feel oppressed by an uneasy suspicion that they really had assembled the confounded engine of death and might soon be called upon to take a ride in it. At least they had used up all the parts available and everything seemed to fit in the place where it had been put.

On the fifth day Captain Samuel Tupper had breakfasted as usual with General Cassiano and took this occasion to remark that he needed a little pocket change. He would like to have a thousand dollars. Never having possessed any such sum in his life, Sam's easy reference to it might fairly be called masterly.

"But the machine, is it ready?" General Cassiano asked.

He seemed to be impatient for the first time.

"Just about ready," Sam replied.

And acting upon an evil inspiration he added:

"We will test the engine this afternoon."

"Excellent," General Cassiano commented. "Just as soon as the machine is ready you must fly to general headquarters and bring some money. I am out of money and the soldiers are becoming impatient. In a venture of this sort plenty of money is the first essential. Money, money and more money. That is what it takes to win a war. Do you not notice how sad are the faces of our men? They want their money."

It had always been Sam's observation that a Mexican is born with a sad face and he had failed to notice any change for the worse. But he took the general's word for it and accordingly felt depressed. In fact he felt worse than that. If he or Barnes had to fly to general headquarters for money he might as well kiss dreams of wealth farewell.

While all these developments had been in progress Captain Barnes sat beside Sam eating fried rice, or trying to, and patiently waiting for an interpretation. When the Spanish conversation lulled, however, he said:

"Tell you what let's do, Buddy. Just for the fun of it, let's try to tune up that engine after breakfast and see if it will run."

"All right," Sam agreed.

Accordingly the three men acted as escort for a tank of gasoline immediately after their meal, and surrounded what appeared to be an airplane, all three of them secretly harboring uncertainties on that point, however.

The tank was filled and Captain Barnes stepped into the driver's seat. Sam had a sudden sensation of gooseflesh.

"Better look out," he advised.

"I don't think it will fly," Captain Barnes said reassuringly.

"But what if it does?"

"Then I'm in hard luck."

Barnes began moving levers and controls, and turning various little black buttons. These efforts were eventually rewarded by a sputtering sound somewhere inside the hood.

"Now, whirl the propellers," he shouted.

Sam, though terrified, obeyed like a man in a dream. But there was nothing dreamy about this action in getting away when the engine responded.

The propellers whirled perhaps two seconds and the machine was threatening to move when both blades separated from their moorings. One flew off over the camp while the other shattered into splinters on the ground. Captain Barnes promptly stopped the engine.

"——! That was lucky," he exclaimed, mopping his brow.

"Terrible," groaned General Cassiano.

"You've got a charmed life," was Sam's comment.

"If I had even dreamed that thing would start——"

Captain Barnes was unable to conclude the sentence because of the pressing necessity for swallowing first his Adam's apple and then his heart. Eventually his legs responded to orders and he was able to step out and down to the ground. Then the three men ranged themselves in a line and looked dolefully at the derelict airship.

"Where is general headquarters?" Captain Samuel Tupper asked General Cassiano.

The commander told him.

Sam estimated the distance at two hundred and seventy miles. He knew every mile of the road. In an automobile it would be easy. Three words were roaring through his mind incessantly:

"Fifty thousand dollars!"

"General, I'll go in an automobile," he said.

"You would be killed."

"I don't think so."

"What's the trouble?" asked Captain Barnes.

Sam explained.

"How much money do you need, general?" Sam asked.

"Two million dollars."

THAT settled it, so far as Sam was concerned. His duties had covered a considerable portion of the gamut of human activities, but never had he been custodian of two million dollars and he thirsted for the experience—not to say the thrill.

During the remainder of the day there was much argument, pro and con, that being the nature of the argument, but the rising moon looked down upon a tiny black speck which might easily have been mistaken for a frightened bug as it scuttled over the smooth winding dirt road.

At the wheel sat Captain Samuel Tupper and at his right shoulder sat Captain George Barnes. Neither wore his uniform. Moreover, their credentials were written on a very small piece of paper. General Cassiano had been in favor of something elaborate with a gold seal and some pink ribbons, neatly enclosed in sealing wax, but Sam stubbornly fought for paper that could be chewed and swallowed in an emergency.

Even at a distance there was something about the movement of that automobile which gave evidence of frightened occupants. The trail of dust behind it was half a mile long.

Seven hours of steady travel brought them to general headquarters. Either they maintained an average speed of nearly forty miles an hour or Sam had made an error in his estimate of the distance. Another theory, advanced by Captain Barnes, was that they had skipped over ten or twelve miles of valley.

They were asked on arrival if they had been challenged along the way but neither was sure. Three times they recalled having heard some one yell at them but whether these yells were challenges or well-merited curses for reckless driving they could not determine. At any rate they were there without accident and with enough water and oil in two large extra tanks, carried as baggage, for the return trip.

General José Alejandre Nieto conducted

them to a large one-story adobe building which was brilliantly lighted. They could hear the roar and rattle of machinery in operation within. A truck stood near the door and workmen were loading it with small paper cartons. Another truck stood in line, evidently waiting its turn.

"What are they doing in there?" Sam asked General Nieto.

"Making money," was the astonishing reply.

"Farewell, fifty thousand dollars," Sam groaned, not aloud, but nonetheless earnestly.

He no longer stood in awe of the imposing figure, two millions. In fact he wouldn't even wait in line for it.

"General, we have come through the enemy's lines on a very dangerous and important mission," he said. "It is necessary for us to return at once. Will you be so kind as to place us ahead of the others who are waiting?"

General Nieto examined again the note they had presented and stepped inside. A moment later he reappeared and summoned them, explaining that there happened to be on hand two millions of dollars in currency of large denomination—one hundred dollar bills, to be exact.

If they would accept their two millions all in bills of one hundred dollars they could have it at once and proceed. Sam did not need to ponder this proposition. Having his own private opinion of the value of the currency he would have accepted it in seven dollar bills or seven thousand dollar bills. He found no reason to object on that ground. Consequently all was arranged within a very few minutes.

However, Sam and his companion wasted half a minute watching the workmen who were making this money. Sheets of it were rolling out of what appeared to be a newspaper press. Other bills were being produced one at a time on little presses originally designed for printing letter heads.

The workmen were stripped to the waist, attired only in trousers and sandals, and running about evidently in feverish haste. Streaks and daubs of ink splashed their brown shoulders and faces with somber or gaudy colors. In fact this printing plant seemed to be the very heart and center of the revolution.

With the two-million-dollar cargo carelessly stowed between cans of water and gasoline Captains Barnes and Tupper adjourned to a restaurant operated for the artillerymen of the printing presses and drank black coffee. They were also supplied with handfuls of dried beef, but an experiment indicated that eating it would be a time-consuming operation so they carried it away with them.

Less than an hour after their arrival they were again on the road. The return trip would be made principally by daylight, but Sam figured that this was far less suspicious than traveling by night.

It was their plan of campaign to trust entirely to speed. If closely pressed they would shoot, otherwise not. If captured they were to report that their goods and an additional automobile had been taken from them by the rebels who had paid them with the currency in their possession. This story was carefully rehearsed as they sped toward the Rio Grande and they were sure of agreement on the details.

But they were not challenged. Sam's guess about riding by day was correct.

Night found them again in the camp of General Juan Jesus Cassiano, caked with dust, and very much in need of sleep. The gallant general called them heroes as he took their hands in both of his. Immediately word spread through the camp that there was money in the treasury and Sam observed a marked improvement in the facial expression of his more humble comrades-in-arms.

However, he was too tired to participate in the joys of his successful mission. He and Captain Barnes retired to their saddle blankets without checking the currency or even asking a receipt for it.

SAM was awakened from a troubled slumber by no less a personage than the commander himself.

"Look at this!" hissed General Cassiano holding before his eyes one of the hundred dollar bills.

It seemed all right to Sam. But when the general turned it over it was not all right. The reverse side read "Fifty pesos." No wonder the general was excited. Moreover, he explained that the entire cargo of currency was printed like this. On one side it was fifty pesos and on the other one hundred pesos.

"There will be mutiny," General Cassiano declared.

But even mutiny seemed to offer less difficulty to Sam than remaining awake another minute.

"Why don't you call them one hundred and fifty dollar bills?" Sam suggested. "That'll fix it."

The smile of the fox brightened General Cassiano's usually stern features. This was nothing short of genius. Not only would the gallant captain's suggestion mend the difficulty, but it would provide one million dollars extra.

As Sam dozed off to sleep again he heard the general say:

"Here is your fifty thousand dollars, my brave hero. Yes, and here is twenty thousand more. You deserve it."

Sam fought sleep long enough to brush the money under his blanket and then surrendered.

It was late in the afternoon when he finally decided to rise from his blanket. The army was scattered about the camp in little groups engaged in gambling games of various sorts. They were busy, contented and evidently happy. Sam did not have to ask if the experiment had succeeded. Beyond question it had registered a bull's eye. In honor of the occasion he resumed the tight-fitting aviator's costume. To place seventy thousand dollars in currency in the pockets of this attire was out of the question so he left it under the saddle blanket.

It was now his purpose to do a little scouting about the camp with a view to crossing the river unobserved, or at least unobserved until he was half way across. After that he was willing to take a chance.

The strange currency had soured his enthusiasm for adventure and he yearned for the bulky silver dollars Uncle Dudley was accustomed to pay each first and fifteenth of the month. The sum was not large, but there was a most engaging eagle on every coin.

He strolled down toward the river bank and there met General Juan Jesus Cassiano who was staring across at a Mexican on the Texas side. Sam thought he recognized the man as a cowboy on Uncle Dudley's ranch but decided he must be mistaken when he observed that the man was signaling to General Cassiano.

"What does he say?" Sam asked.

The commander was startled for a moment, but smiled cordially when he recognized the hero of the camp.

"He signals that another carload of rock salt has arrived and that the trucks will be in town tonight," the general replied. "He also says that you are needed in the office, but I can not spare you. He tells me every day that you are needed in the office Your employer is worried about you, but I tell him every day that you are safe. When I see him I will be happy to inform him that you are a hero."

"Are you going over tonight?" Sam asked.

"Perhaps. But I must wait until I can get some American money to pay for the rock salt. There is a messenger coming from El Paso with American money. He is due here today. If he arrives I will go to Santa Maria tonight. The trucks are in Santa Maria and will wait for me."

Sam at once decided to wait a few more days in the hope of exchanging his seventy thousand pesos for something more acceptable in the retail establishments of Santa Maria. He strolled back to camp with the general. Having in mind the prospective exchange of money he decided to remove his seventy thousand pesos to a safer place. But what place?

Hastily surveying the camp, he took note of the carload of cartridge cases piled in an uneven oblong. He recalled that somewhere toward the middle of that jumble there was a square space big enough for a man to stand in. Therefore he removed his currency from beneath the blanket, climbed up on the cartridge cases and dropped the bundle into this space, which, doubtless, all but he had forgotten. Then he wandered off to look for Captain Barnes and conversation.

Suddenly there was a stir through the camp. Two hundred heads which had been bowed over cards, dice and other games of chance were lifted. Every one was listening. Sam also listened.

Shots were being fired, perhaps a mile or more away. Twenty mounted men—the cavalry of this army—dashed for their carbines and horses. General Juan Jesus Cassiano rushed from his tent coatless, but waving his sword and shouted an order. A Mexican squatting near Sam dropped a handful of cards, seized his bugle, and blew three blasts before rising.

The mounted men were ready for action

in an incredibly short time. As their horses trotted through the camp an infantryman climbed on behind each cavalryman and then the party set out at a gallop. It was a clever plan thus to carry re-enforcements, Sam thought. The extra men dropped off the horses about two hundred yards from the camp. They were evidently to furnish a first line of defense.

This seemed a most propitious time for strolling toward the river. Every one was busy. Sam climbed up on the pile of cartridge cases to get his seventy thousand dollars, and from that vantage point saw a sight which caused his silky blond hair to stand straight up like so many bristles

There was a thin, irregular line of soldiers in uniform approaching the camp from the direction of the river. Drawn up half way out of the water were six flat-bottomed boats in which these soldiers had floated silently down stream. The distant firing was only a diversion and the main attack was coming from the very direction in which Sam wished to travel.

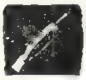
The uniformed soldiers advanced a few paces before they were seen; then several shots were fired at them from the camp. They replied with a thundering volley.

Sam saw little splinters of wood fly from cartridge cases. He lost no time in dropping into the hole in which his money was concealed.

The din and shouting were now terrific and the smell of gunpowder was in the air. Sam wondered if any one had ever occupied a worse position for viewing a battle, but when he contemplated the completeness of his protection he was unwilling to complain. Seconds became hours in such confinement, however. He could hear everything and see nothing.

It was clear that fighting was in progress at two widely separated points. The advance guard which had rushed out of camp was heavily engaged perhaps three or four hundred yards away, but the main battle was taking place in the immediate vicinity of the heap of cartridge cases. Little by little, however, it moved beyond the camp, but away from the river.

That seemed to indicate that the regulars or federals, or as Sam dubbed them, the horse marines, were winning. As the shouting became more distant he began to wonder what, if anything, he would do in the event that a brown face accompanied by a bayonet appeared over his little patch of sunlight. His only weapon was a pocket knife gripped so tightly between the folds of his hip pocket that he could not extract it.



SCARCELY had his hair resumed its accustomed repose on his head when curiosity began to plead for one fleeting glimpse of the situation. He was mentally toying with this temptation when the sounds of shouting and firing again began to approach the camp and several horses galloped past the cartridge cases.

Sam guessed that General Cassiano's skirmishers had also been routed and were falling back toward their support only to find it vanished. This flurry lasted perhaps fifteen seconds; the cavalry battle was plainly enough a running fight.

Again the camp seemed deserted and Sam's curiosity was once more urging him to risk his head. He might have done so, but a new alarm came like the thunder of artillery fire and stiffened his caution. His ears fairly prickled with the intensity of listening. If this were artillery it was evidently of a type that could move rapidly and fire incessantly at the same time, for it was approaching at an astonishing rate of speed.

A few more minutes and the artillery fire became the roar of automobile trucks pounding the road with exhausts wide open. They were unquestionably coming right into the camp. Next the brakes began to grind and the engines ceased their noise, except for an occasional backfire.

"Here's where one bum aviator breaks the altitude record," Sam thought. "Heaven for me, if I'm in luck. Or —— more likely. All for seventy thousand dollars in wall paper."

"Not so far, Bill," Uncle Dudley's voice sang out. "Draw around to the other side so Tom can back in here. That's right, Tom. Now let's get busy."

Sam heaved a sigh and lifted his head above the wooden cases. No one saw him. They were busy reloading the same trucks that had delivered this freight.

"Hello, Uncle Dudley!" Sam called out cheerily.

Uncle Dudley looked straight up and saw nothing. Then Sam lifted himself clear of his hiding place and appeared on top of the mound of boxes.

Uncle Dudley blinked several times, mistrustful of his eyes, and thunderstruck by the uniform. While he was trying to collect his wits Sam was staring at the horizon, looking in vain for the embattled armies. Next he looked about the camp, expecting to see heaps of bodies. There was not a one! Evidently the casualties run true to form for battles of this sort. The two machine guns he had so proudly assembled were in a scrambled heap. Apparently the soldiers had run over them, getting away.

"This must have been the worst battle they ever had here, wasn't it?" Sam asked.

"No. Just about the same as usual," Uncle Dudley replied, still blinking at Sam's uniform. Then:

"Come out of that grind organ monkey makeup, Sam," he ordered sternly, "and help load these trucks."

"I don't know where my other clothes are," Sam objected.

"Then work in your underwear."

That is what Sam did, and never more cheerfully in his life.

As the last case was loaded Tom Phillips, journeyman cowboy and truck driver extraordinary, kicked a bundle of papers, at the same time saying—

"What's this?"

"It's mine," said Sam.

Tom picked up the bundle and examined several of the bills, smiling as he turned them over and observed the inconsistent statements printed thereon.

"I'll give you a dollar for it," was Tom's verdict.

"It's yours," said Sam.

"Hurry up there, you boys," Uncle Dudley ordered.

"What's going on?" Sam asked as he climbed into a seat beside his chief.

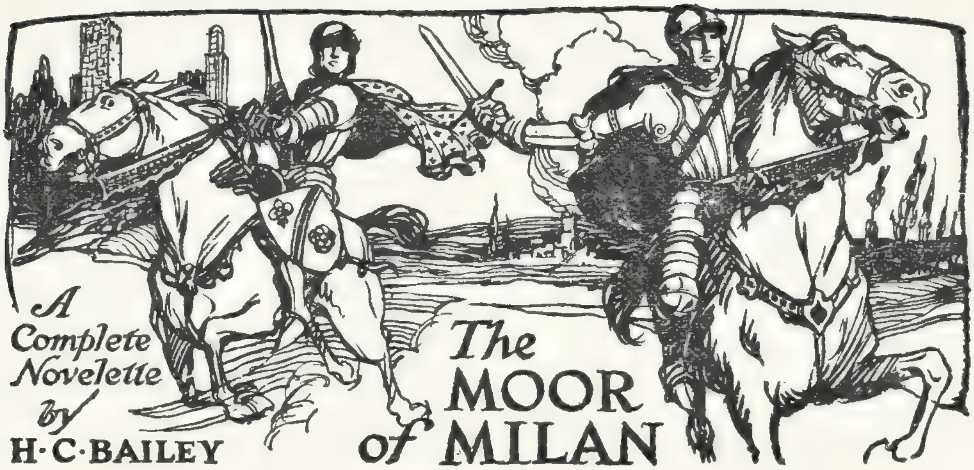
"Well, I had word that the federals were going to clean out this joint today," Uncle Dudley explained. "I've been trying to get word to you to come on home. The federals want a carload of cartridges delivered here tonight. I ordered a carload and they ought to have come in today, but they didn't, so I came over here and got these. They depend on me for cartridges and I didn't want to disappoint them!"

After a brief silence Uncle Dudley resumed:

"Sam, I know that boys will be boys. Fact is I used to be one myself, but you ought to ask me about things like this before joining any armies. I always know what's going on and which side has the cash. You got on the wrong side. And another, Sam, I was worried about you running around in an airplane. Them things is dangerous. I read in the paper only the other day about one of them tumbling down and busting up a couple of fellows."

To all of which Sam replied with a repentant—

"Yes, sir."



A Complete Novelette by

H·C·BAILEY

The MOOR of MILAN

Author of "The Babes in the Woods," "The Man in the Cage," etc.

"NOW, my master," said Messire Thibaut, "has the nature of a baby, which being in bed tries to fall out or being by the fire tries to fall in, is never content with what it has and—to sum up—wants the world. Such is my master."

This is to explain why Silvain rode out from the pleasant town of Novara. There he had honor and revenues, there he was loved, but it gave him nothing to do. For a while the boy who reigned there and his sister had been in peril, and Silvain was content to guard them. But in their weakness their neighbors had not assailed them, and soon alliance with the Duke of Savoy made them safe against any enemy. The children had no more need of him, Novara basked in peace and Silvain rode away.

He made over the dank ricefields for Milan in quest of deeds. Milan offered good hope of war. Its master, Lodovico Sforza, whom men called the Moor, because his face was dark, had to meet danger from the southward. Florence and Naples were arming against him. He had the name of a subtle and bold captain, he was likely to be pressed hard. In his affairs Silvain saw promise of noble ventures. And it was common talk that Lodovico had won the King of France to come to his help. Then a knight who fought for Lodovico would find himself fighting under the golden lilies in the army of France. Silvain asked no better fortune of God for life or death.

So he rode happily over that somber, misty plain, mighty handsome with his blue and gold and his glittering breastplate and his gallant black charger. Messire Thibaut had a good Lombardy mare, and the steel on his narrow chest was engraved and bright and the rest of him crimson velvet—which made his gaunt face look the hungrier—and he led a horse which bore a great pack of armor and fine clothes. With all these riches they caught up a knight who had none.

He was solid in the saddle, not a great height but square. No squire rode with him and he carried all his own armor and arms—helmet on, shield hung from his neck, lance upright in the stirrup—and all were good honest stuff and well kept but plain.

Silvain saluted him—

"We go the same way, sir. Give me leave to ride with you."

"If you choose a poor man's company you are welcome," the stranger answered readily.

His vizor was up and Silvain saw a round rosy face smiling. The man was younger than his square bulk suggested; he looked a simple lad.

"I have my fortune to win yet," Silvain smiled back.

"And I have all to win and only myself to lose."

"Sir, I think we are made to be friends. I am Silvain de St. Lo, a knight of France, and I ride through the world seeking honor."

The stranger bowed to the great name.

"For my part I am riding to Milan," he

said, "and my name is Louis Bonivard. I have come out of Switzerland to take my pleasure in Italy." He laughed shyly. "You see; I am nobody, Sir Silvain. And you—you are a knight of renown. It is a great thing to me to ride by your side."

"Are your ventures all to come, Louis? Happy man!"

"I can not tell. God send I shall not fail in my hour," said Louis humbly, and began to make Silvain talk of his adventures. He had an eager appetite for tales of fighting and plied Silvain with questions of how each deed was done, and his wonder and his boyish praises were pleasant to hear.

But Messire Thibaut, jogging along behind, made grimaces.

"What does this Switzer want of us?" said he to himself. "Oh, my master, tell me what a great man you are, quoth my wife as she felt for my purse."

Louis Bonivard seemed to want nothing but to hear how Silvain had broken into a castle here or out of a castle there and every device of rescue or flight, and they came very happily to Milan. There the only harm that he did was to confess he could not afford so fine an inn as that which Messire Thibaut thought fit for his master's greatness.

He was for going off alone to some humbler place and when Silvain swore they should lodge together he had many shy excuses and apologies. And Thibaut, though he made a sour face at the little remote tavern to which they came, could not much blame the lad who would plainly have been well content to part from them. And Louis, like a good youth, fell to grooming his horse and cleaning his armor while Silvain went out to see the town.

None so busy, none so rich he had found in all his travels. It bewildered him. He lingered a while where, dimly seen through a veil of workmen's tackle, the white magnificence of the cathedral rose for his worship. He went on to discover a town of palaces and townsfolk with the state and the airs of courtiers. He must needs wonder how so many people could be wealthy and who could buy all the show of silver ware and silken stuffs in the shops. A town of enchantment, a paradise of the works of men.

He was ill at ease. Not in such a place as this was there honor for a bright sword. He came to the castle and saw a troop of hired men-at-arms march out. They were trained men, well drilled and their equipment gorgeous, but they had no spirit in them. They moved like lackeys. They made a square before the castle and a crowd gathered and gaped, and a herald came out and made proclamation of a trial at arms to which the Lord Lodovico bade all gentlemen of noble blood.

SILVAIN went back to his little tavern singing to himself. Louis Bonivard was in a corner with pen and paper

"Do you write chronicles or ballads, child?" Silvain laughed.

"If you please, I keep my accounts," said Louis Bonivard.

Silvain opened his eyes. Such a knight was new to him.

"Here is better work for you, Louis," he said gently. "They hold a trial of arms in Milan tomorrow."

"Oh, sir, you will win rich honor," said Louis Bonivard.

"We will venture ourselves," Silvain smiled. "It is a noble chance for a young knight. All Italy will hear of him who does gallantly."

"I?" said Bonivard. "Alas, my lord, I dare not. I have not proved myself."

Silvain frowned.

"By my faith that is a reason to dare, not flinch, child."

"I would not flinch in fight, I think," said Bonivard meekly. "But I do not seek a fight, sir. I have no mind to match myself against proved champions. I should go down."

This reasonable temper was disgusting to Silvain. He set himself for the good of Louis Bonivard's soul to shame the lad into riding in the joust. Bonivard was humble, smooth, impenetrable. Silvain could not make him feel that to stand out of a trial for fear of failure was dishonor. Nothing stirred him, not reproach nor appeal nor mockery. Silvain could hardly believe he was real. And at last in despair, "Fie, go to your accounts. That is fit work for you," he cried and stalked away, and Louis Bonivard made a supper of bread and beans and went off to sleep by his horse. In the morning he was gone.

Silvain and Thibaut in all their glory rode out to the castle. The lists were set in the tilt-yard, where under a canopy sat the Lord

Lodovico and his lady, Beatrice, and their court. At one end a triple tent was hung with three shields, for the order of the fight was that three of Lodovico's captains defied all who came against them. At the other end gathered those ready to venture, and heralds took their names and ranks. Each man might choose which shield his squire should strike, which captain he would challenge and attack. When Silvain gave his name he asked which of the three was accounted the best knight. The heralds answered him that all were great champions.

"God be thanked," said he. "Go forward, brother, and strike upon each shield and all."

Then the marshals of the lists whispered together and the other knights who had come to the joust, flashing Italian soldiers of fortune, stared at him and one cried out—

"Who are you, sir, that you should go first?"

"Sir, I am a stranger and claim to go before no man. But I crave leave to answer any man who hangs up his shield to fight."

The end of that was that others began the joust, and with ill fortune. For the three captains, Ercole of Mantua and Gottfried the Saxon and Basil of Rhodes, were nobly mounted and equipped, and, though none of them had the vigor of youth, they were heavy men and strong in the saddle and ready with all the devices of the tilt-yard. Man after man went down before their lances, and the only point they lost in a dozen courses was by chance, when a youth from Genoa on a wild horse broke his lance on Basil, though Basil missed him as he swerved.

The townspeople were cheering the three champions of Milan, the great folks under the canopy whispering and yawning, and the Lord Lodovico was heard to swear that there was no young blood in Italy, when Thibaut rode down the lists and made a lance-head chime on each of the three shields.

Lodovico bent a dark brow to stare at him and sent to ask who his master might be, and the ladies tittered and called Messire Thibaut a splendid scarecrow.

"Like master, like man," quoth Lodovico. "Here is some mad knight-errant."

"Then he is very welcome, my lord," said the Lady Beatrice. "God have mercy, we need a madman in Milan. Here is nothing but cold sanity," and she made believe to shiver.

Lodovico smiled at her.

"I am condemned. You live in romance, Lady, and I in this dull world. It is my misfortune."

A herald came to Lodovico and said that the challenger was a Frenchman, Silvain de St. Lo.

"I was in the right, Beatrice," Lodovico laughed. "A madman it is—the knight-errant of Novara."

"That man! Look to me well, my lord, I lost my heart to him long ago. Oh, I pray that he will go down!"

"What? Why should you want him beaten if you love him?"

She laughed.

"Oh man, man! I would have him defeated that I might comfort him. And I know he would be divine in defeat."

But she was not to see Silvain beaten that day.

WHEN he rode against Ercole, who was accounted the stronger of the three champions, each man broke his first lance fairly with no advantage and at the second, Silvain, riding faster and coming forward sharply in the saddle at the shock, struck Ercole upon the helmet and hurled him down. Then Gottfried came out and tried to use Silvain's own tactics against him, but rode so fast that his aim at Silvain's head was wild and Silvain swayed from it, and the point missed while Gottfried crashed upon Silvain's lance and was brought up with shattered shield and the lancehead in his arm.

Basil, the knight from Rhodes, was cunning and in the first course swerved and crossed Silvain and struck him on the body, a foul stroke. The marshals spoke together, conferred with Lodovico and proclaimed that Basil was vanquished. Silvain demanded a second course. Basil was sullen and yielded only when Lodovico sent to bid him win back his honor. He rode out like a beaten man. He was hurled from the saddle, bent and whirling. And Silvain turned his horse and came back to the heralds and bade them proclaim that Sir Silvain de St. Lo would ride a course against any knight who sought to win honor that day.

Ercole, the vanquished Ercole, sent a herald to ask that Silvain would ride another course with him. It was against the rule and the marshals came to confer with Lodovico.

"Ercole is down," said he. "Why should the Frenchman let him up again? But if he will he may."

So they left it to Silvain to decide.

"Why, my lords," he cried, "how should I refuse a knight who would prove himself upon me? Let us ride it, I pray you."

When Lodovico heard that, he shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Here is a gambler!" quoth he. "Having won all the stakes, he will set them all on another cast."

"A dear mad fellow," said the Lady Beatrice. "I pray that he loses. That would be perfect."

But he did not lose. Ercole came on a fresh horse and Silvain on the charger that had carried him in all his courses. Ercole rode at a great pace and aimed at Silvain's helm and struck it, indeed. But Silvain, going soberly, bent forward to the shock and the lancepoint glanced up and away, and Ercole, having made ready for a heavy blow which did not come, reeled in the saddle as Silvain's lance met his shield. He was thrust from his horse easily like a bad rider and heard men laugh as he fell. And once more the heralds proclaimed him vanquished.

"I pray you, sirs," said Silvain, "ask if any other knight will come against me that I may help him to win honor."

But Lodovico stood up and cried—

"Enough, enough! Sir Silvain de St. Lo, we judge you victor. For you have conquered by skill in arms and by courtesy. You have the honor of this trial."

Then the marshals came to Silvain and took off his helmet and led him between them to the Lady Beatrice and he knelt at her feet, and she put over his head a golden chain, and there were trumpets for him and shouting.

IN THIS manner Silvain came to lodge in the castle of Milan. For Lodovico, as the custom was, made him the guest of honor at a banquet and then would not let him go, swearing that he could not afford to lose a knight of such prowess. It seemed to Silvain that the trial at arms had been planned to discover a champion for Lodovico's service, and he was content. But the only task offered him was to amuse the Lady Beatrice. She took possession of him; she would not tire of making him talk.

In her bower, a place of white marble and ebony and silver, she lay on a couch, lithe and beautiful in a gown that clung rosy about her and left white shoulders and bosom bare. She set her hands behind her head, hidden in her golden hair and laughed at him.

"What do you want of the world?" she said. "You have lived your life, winning fortune for other folks, and your youth goes by and you have no joy of it and——"

"Lady, I have never known man nor woman who lived happier."

"Then look at me!" she cried.

"Indeed that would make any man happy."

"By my faith, it has made some men wretched, Silvain," she smiled. "Look at me, then. I have all things at my desire, riches and honor and power. And you are a lonely, poor knight, who has won nothing by all his striving and must die naked as he was born."

"So must we all," Silvain said.

"But I shall have lived my life. You will have had nothing of yours."

"By God's grace, I have done some little things," Silvain said gently.

"And I have done nothing? Is that it? Why, child, the world will talk of Beatrice of Milan when you are dead and dust. I have had power over men. But let me be what you say. I have done nothing, I am nothing! Then in God's name why do you come to serve me?"

"I serve those who need, lady. For the joy of the venture and the honor."

She flung out her white arms and pointed at him:

"He saves others! himself he will not save!" And she laughed. "A saint you are, not a knight nor a man."

It was there or thereabouts that Lodovico came in. He was with them before they knew it, for he had a stealthy manner. He looked from one to the other; there was no sign of what he thought on his handsome dark face, but he said with a clank of mockery:

"You amuse my wife, sir. You are more fortunate than I am."

"Why he thinks he is," said Beatrice. "I have never known a man so pleased with himself. Show him all that you have, my lord, and he will say, 'I thank you; I had rather be Silvain de St. Lo.' "

"He is happy," said Lodovico.

"Oh, happy!" she cried. "But why does he come to Milan? Did ever you meet a man in your house who wanted nothing?"

"There is no such man in the world," said Lodovico.

"At least I have never seen him," Silvain smiled. "Sir, my lady jeers at me. I am the greediest soul alive. I have sought fortune and honor all my days."

"And what have you won?" said the lady. "Not six feet of ground for your grave."

"I have had honor of men," Silvain said gently. "I have my fame that I could lay at the feet of God if I die tonight. And my life is not lived yet."

Lodovico looked at his wife. Lodovico's thin lips smiled.

"You are right. He wants nothing of you. That is what a woman can not forgive. What will you give him, Beatrice? Death?" He turned to Silvain. "You have made an enemy, sir." His smile faded; his dark face was expressionless. "It is unfortunate. I had something to offer you, but my lady rules all."

"You!" Beatrice laughed. "What could you give him, Lodovico? If you gave him all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them he would not serve you."

"You are bitter, madam," said Lodovico. "I pray you let us speak man to man. Sir, I have only a venture to give you, a venture of danger and honor. I ask your service for a woman in need. You are free to choose."

"My lord, I shall thank you for any noble venture," said Silvain.

"It is this: Pavia was friendly to Milan of old and I do not hide from you it is much to me in the war which comes upon us that the town should be friendly still. Its lord died in the Spring and his only heir is the Lady Clarissa. But he kept a company of hireling soldiers, and their chief, Carlo the Sicilian, has seized the town and the lady, and he holds her prisoner and has made himself lord of Pavia in her stead. If I march against him and make a siege of the town, before I break in he will surely kill her. I find no hope for her in war or policy. To take up her cause is to condemn her to death. I dare not do it.

"So here is a venture desperate enough. I am frank with you. If you can save her it will serve me well for I can fight for her right and drive Carlo to the —— and win the town. But it is for her I bid you go. She must waste away in prison or die murdered when her death will serve Carlo, unless a man comes who can deliver her."

Beatrice smiled.

"You bid the man go to his death, my lord," she said. "For the joy of the venture and the honor of it!" And she looked at Silvain and laughed.

"I go, lady," Silvain said.

PAVIA stands where rivers meet in the plain. It stood within great walls then and men called it the city of a hundred towers, so many there were on the ramparts and within the town, gaunt things of ancient brick.

Into Pavia as the evening mists were rising from the wet rice fields came two shabby travelers. They were soldiers by trade, they said, at the humble tavern to which they went, they hired themselves out to merchants who needed a guard for their caravans of goods, they were looking for another job, but times were bad and at the best it was a dog's life. Please St. Nicholas, they might find business doing in Pavia.

Such was the tale Thibaut told the landlord over a flash of harsh red Lombardy wine and he told it well. But at the end he looked up into the simple young face of Louis Bonivard. It was Messire Thibaut who showed surprise. Louis Bonivard saluted him with a stranger's civility:

"A newcomer, sir? You have chosen a good inn," and turned away to speak to a servant and went out.

In the street Silvain came up behind him.

"Sir, we must know each other better," Silvain said and linked arms with him.

"Sir, you flatter me. But when we parted you did not want to know any more of me. Well, I was content."

"It is possible I have done you a wrong. I did not expect to meet Louis Bonivard in Pavia."

Bonivard looked quickly round him. There was no one near them.

"I ride through Italy for my pleasure," he said.

Silvain smiled.

"Pavia is no town of pleasure."

"You are wrong, sir. I have had very pleasant hours in Pavia."

"Pray sir, show me how to enjoy the place," said Silvain.

Bonivard hesitated.

"What do you want of me?" he said in a low voice. "Why do you follow me?"

"By my faith, I did not follow you. That I should find you in Pavia, I never thought when I came."

"Then go your way and let me go mine. You despise me, you told me so. What I do is nothing to you and, I promise you, what you may do is nothing to me."

"Sir, you are very mysterious."

"I?" Bonivard laughed. "I am a simple Swiss gentleman riding to see the world. But you—" he shrugged—"my faith, what are you? If I go to the castle and tell my Lord Carlo that Silvain de St. Lo is in the town in disguise you will not long be free."

"Who knows?" Silvain smiled. "For you will not go, my friend."

"I owe you nothing and I do not fear you."

"Then go if you will and betray me. It is true, I am here by stealth and in disguise. I have come to Pavia to deliver the Lady Clarissa from her prison. Here is news that Carlo will pay a price for, my friend."

"You are mad," said Louis Bonivard, and again he looked behind him. Then he began to laugh. "Why do you tell me such a tale?"

"Because it is true. See, I am in your hand, Louis. Betray me; go your own way; join with me—you have the choice."

Bonivard did not answer. He turned sharp out of the narrow street into the square before the castle and led Silvain into the middle of it. There certainly no one could overhear them.

"You are very careful, Louis." Silvain smiled.

"What is the Lady Clarissa to you?" said Bonivard in a low voice.

"I never saw her. But she is a woman in captivity. It is a knight's work to deliver her."

"What have you to gain by it?"

"Oh Louis, Louis!" Silvain shook his head. "You are still keeping accounts! I seek nothing and nothing shall I take but the honor of the venture."

"But it is a mad thing," said Bonivard heavily. "She is here in prison and Carlo has five hundred men-at-arms in his pay. What can you do for her?"

"Have you found no way to her yet?" said Silvain softly.

Bonivard stopped and stared at him and said at last:

"Swear that you will be true to her, Sir Silvain."

"I have never been false to man or woman. By my father's soul I will be true to you and your lady."

Bonivard grasped his hand.

"I should thank God for you. This is a hard venture. But tell me how did you know I came for her? If any man suspects me, there is no hope for me or her."

Silvain laughed.

"I think no man knows you but me, Louis. You are the wariest youth in the world. But you puzzled me. You were so eager to hear of knightly ventures, yet when one came you would not take it. I thought then it was for your own sake you were careful. But still you puzzled me. When I found you here in Pavia I saw light. You were not your own man. You have saved yourself for a nobler venture. I put you to the test and you showed me yourself while you tried to hide. Forgive me, Louis."

"I might have trusted you," Bonivard said. "Sir, I loved the Lady Clarissa long ago and while her father lived I had hope of her. For she gave me her heart, though he planned a better marriage. Then his death came and this knave Carlo flung her into prison. My father bade me forget her, for our lands are far away by Geneva and he would not venture his strength in Italy. But I was bound to her and I am here."

"It is well done," said Silvain. "And now, what is to do? In which of the hundred towers is your lady? Have you found her yet?"

"I have found her," Bonivard said heavily.

III

THEY passed through the dark streets and climbed the rampart where it was low on the riverbank. Close upon the water, bulging out from the rampart like a buttress, rising high above it, stood a tower.

Bonivard stopped.

"She is there. It is the red tower, where the lords of Pavia kept the townsfolk who troubled them. And if the town tried to rescue them, they were flung into the river."

"She is there," Silvain repeated and looked long. He could make out no guard at the gate, but in the dark mass of the tower a narrow window here and there made a point of light. "You are sure?"

Bonivard whistled a scrap of a tune. Silvain recognized an old folk song:

When at night I lie in bed
I bethink me of my love.

It was lost in the murmur of the river. But one of the lights in the tower moved, it was hidden, something white waved from a window.

"She is there," Bonivard said. "She is waiting. And I—I can not tell what to do."

"Go and sleep, Louis. I watch," said Silvain.

"Watch here? You must not be seen. That would destroy us all."

Silvain laughed.

"I was never yet seen unless I chose. Go, child, go. Tell my brother Thibaut I do not need him this night."

IN THE morning he came reeling into the tavern like a man who had spent the night in a debauch and while he slept Messire Thibaut complained to the landlord that he was a sad fellow, a weak fellow, a drunken dog. When he waked, he had nothing to tell the anxious Bonivard but that he would watch another night.

When he came back on the second day, weak in the leg again and confused in the head, Messire Thibaut swore to the landlord that he had had enough of it and there was no holding the fellow in a town and they must take the road again. So, as soon as Silvain could be waked, he was set on his horse and led away. Out of Pavia they went and beyond the town Louis Bonivard caught them up.

"What device is this, sir?" he asked eagerly. "You do not trust me, though I have trusted in you."

"I shall trust you with my life tonight, child," Silvain said. "Be patient. If we have not our horses safe beyond the town there is no safety."

Bonivard stared and saw that Thibaut had a led-horse with a bundle on its back.

"Yes, lord, here is your lady's horse and here is her saddle," said Thibaut. "That I have found for you. Go find the lady; that is your part."

They left Messire Thibaut with all the horses and came back to the town afoot and stole in in the dusk by another gate and in another tavern Louis Bonivard wrote his lady a letter thus:

Do not sleep but be ready.

When it was dark they walked on the ramparts, and coming near the tower Silvain took from under his cloak an orange and tossed it up into the barred window from which the lady had waved.

"Please God she is alone," Bonivard muttered.

"They keep her alone," said Silvain placidly. "She could never have come to the window else. Do not begin to fear, brother."

Alone she was, for in a while she came to the window again and waved her scarf.

"The letter is read," said Silvain. "We have no more to do here this long while."

And he took Bonivard to supper at the other end of the town.

When honest folk were abed, they came to the riverside again and at the steps by the bridge Silvain stayed a moment and counted the boats tied there and stole down and looked at their fastenings. Then he climbed back to the ramparts and they drew into the shadow of the battlements and waited.

All the clocks of Pavia had struck twelve. The officer of the night was going his rounds. They saw him coming back from the bridge gate on the farther bank, lighted by a lantern that his sergeant carried. Sergeant and officer climbed to the ramparts.

As they came by Silvain rose and struck at their heads. Both men went down before they knew it and the only sound was the thud of the falling bodies. Then Silvain and Bonivard lashed them up together in their own girdles and gagged them with their own dagger hilts and took their cloaks from them and their lantern and went on to the tower.

Muffled in the officer's cloak, Silvain knocked and when he was challenged made answer as he had heard answer given on other nights, that he was the officer of the rounds. The door was opened. A sleepy sergeant of the guard grinned and asked if the captain would drink a cup of wine.

Silvain strode into a dimly lighted entry. Out of it a winding stair climbed up the tower. A door stood open from it to a guardroom beyond where three men sprawled at their ease.

The sergeant turned away to fetch the

wine. His keys were snatched from his hand. He found himself lying on his face in the guardroom and heard the door slam behind him. Before he or his men had collected their wits they were locked in.

Bonivard darted up the stair with the keys in his hand. He cried, "Clarissa! Clarissa!" heard her answer, and found the door of the cell and had her in his arms.

"Swift, my children," Silvain called.

The men in the guardroom had begun to hammer at the door and shout, but the door was strong and the windows were barred.

Bonivard and his Clarissa came tumbling downstairs, Silvain thrust them out before him and shut the door of the tower and locked it and tossed the keys into the river. Bonivard and he took the girl between them and ran along the ramparts. From the tower the clamor of the imprisoned guard came dull on the night air.

"They will rouse the town," Bonivard panted.

"Time is all," said Silvain. "Do not fear yet, brother."

But the woman laughed.

"What is fear now?" she said.

They came to the steps by the bridge and scrambled into a boat, and Silvain lashed with his sword at the ropes that bound the other boats and set all adrift on the swift stream.

Downstream they sped, close under the ramparts and as they went heard footsteps above them and voices, saw lights moving toward the clamor in the tower. But safe and unchallenged they came beyond the walls and rowed on through the thin mist.

AN OWL hooted over the bank. Silvain looked round.

"Pull your left, brother," he said, and lay on his oars.

The boat turned out of the rush of the stream into slack water, brushed against reeds and shallows. The owl hooted again. Silvain bent to his oars and the boat came into the bank by firm ground.

There stood Messire Thibaut with his horses, and his teeth chattered. Bonivard swung his lady ashore and put her in the saddle.

But Thibaut grunted—

"Now are we out of the trap, as the rats said when they were let loose for the dogs."

"Ride, brother, ride," Silvain said. "The road to Milan."

"That is the road of all roads they will look for us, lord."

"It is the only road to safety, brother. Forward, forward!"

Messire Thibaut led on through the night mists. They had to cross the fields by a narrow causeway on which they could make no speed.

When they came at last to the high road Silvain bade the others ride on and himself halted to listen. Through the quiet murmurs of the night harsher sounds were borne; he heard a trumpet call and another.

"So! They are after us already," he smiled. "This Carlo is better served than I thought."

He galloped away.

When he was up with the others he bade Thibaut lead and set such a pace as a company of men-at-arms could hold, keeping together.

"So we shall spare our horses and they will not gain on us."

"But who told you they will keep together, lord?" Thibaut protested. "Surely they will send on their best horses at their best speed."

"I shall be ready, brother," said Silvain. "You are the guide. Sir Louis rides with his lady. I am the rear guard. Forward!"

And what happened was what he had foreseen. The pursuers, not knowing how strong the fugitives might be, held together but sent light horsemen on ahead to find them. The dark of the night fought for Silvain, who, when he heard a horse gaining on him, halted and waited and dashed at the rider unawares and beat him down. So he held off the scouts and the main body coming upon one man and another overthrown were assured that they had a strong force in front of them and followed the more soberly, and the fugitives made mile after mile toward Milan and kept their lead.

But Messire Thibaut looked to the eastward and groaned.

"The night is our friend," said he. "Now comes the day."

A streak of the eastern sky gave a pale light, clear between cloud banks. The mist over the ricefields grew silvery. Silvain drew up beside Bonivard.

"Forward, now, Louis," he said. "No more use to nurse the horses. Carry her off. Ride, ride!"

Bonivard looked at him.

"You have the honor," he said hoarsely.

"Come, Clarissa." And they galloped on.

Silvain and Thibaut held their old steady pace and Thibaut looked about him over the open country, where was no cover near or far, nor any turn in the straight road and hunched his shoulders. "Pity me," he grunted. "I shall die without my breakfast."

They were seen. The squadron behind them saw how few they were and broke rank and came roaring on. Silvain checked and turned, and drew his sword. But some one else had seen them too. Away down the road to Milan a single horseman was halted holding aloft a lance with a pennon and he blew a trumpet call and cried a challenge to Bonivard.

Silvain turned again.

"Milan!" he shouted. "Friends of Milan! Milan to aid!" and Thibaut and he galloped after Bonivard. "Silvain of France I am," he cried as he came. "I ride for the Lord Lodovico."

Other horsemen were coming up to the man with the lance. They barred the road, they brought Bonivard and the lady to a stand.

"Let them pass, friends," Silvain cried. "I bring them to the Lord Lodovico. And here is Carlo of Pavia hunting us and we are spent. Hold off his knaves for me."

The horsemen were now some half-score and had an officer. He stared at Silvain, raised his hand in salute.

"Open out, lads. Let them pass. Ride to the captain, Beppo, and tell him Sir Silvain has come with the girl and a pack of wolves at his heels. How many, my lord?"

"Call them fifty, sir. Good thanks."

"I call them a hundred. No matter; we will make play. And Ercole is behind. Good thanks to you, my lord. Here is sport. Ride on, ride on!"

He set his men going and dashed at the leaders of the pursuit and Silvain, looking over his shoulder, saw the first of a pretty skirmish, but his horse was jaded and he sighed and rode on after Bonivard.

Before them loomed up the walls of an old castle and out of it came troops of men-at-arms. Bonivard stopped and looked back at Silvain.

"Where have you brought us, sir?" he said in a low voice.

"Why, that is Binasco, a castle of Lodovico's. We are on his land now. By my faith, it was time, Louis." Silvain laughed and looked back at the skirmish. "He keeps good watch on his frontier."

"Is Lodovico your lord?" Bonivard frowned. "He is none of mine. I do not trust him."

"He and his have saved you. And safe you are, Louis. Trust me."

A burly knight came cantering up at the head of a squadron, Ercole, Silvain's old foe of the trial of arms.

"Well done, brother," he laughed and waved his hand. "I do the rest," and he clattered on to the fight and after him came another squadron of horse and a great company of footmen.

Slowly along the side of the road Silvain and his party came to the castle.

"What have you for me now?" Bonivard said sullenly.

"A day's sleep, child," Silvain smiled. "That is her need," and he looked at Clarissa who hung over her horse's neck and swayed.

"In Lodovico's castle? Not I. I ride on. I will not trust him."

"You are my guest, Sir Louis," Silvain said. "I pray you is there any reason why you should not trust me?"

"Oh Louis!" Clarissa cried and looked at him piteously and began to weep.

"Hush, hush, for ——'s sake," Bonivard cried.

"She has borne enough," Silvain said gently. "You are safe, lady; you and he. I say it, I, Silvain de St. Lo. Go in!"

INTO the castle courtyard they rode and a sleek seneschal, bowing low before Silvain declared that the castle was at his orders, for the Lord Lodovico had sent orders to give Sir Silvain de St. Lo all honor if he came.

Silvain smiled. It seemed to him that Lodovico felt a proper confidence in his success. And honor they had at Binasco, zealous service, rich fare and rooms of luxury and quiet, and so slept out the day.

Silvain waked in the gloaming with a servant beside him who said that the Lady Beatrice had come to the castle and bade him wait on her.

He was taken to the warden's tower and went up to the council chamber and found her there alone. She started up and saluted him like a man.

"Hail, conqueror!" she laughed. "I have flown to your triumph. All hail! And now you have won her, what will you do with her? Give her away?"

"No, my lady."

Beatrice clasped her hands and made a face of languishing ecstasy.

"Oh heaven! The all-conquering is conquered at last! He has found a creature worthy of his excellence. He deigns to be in love. But what honor for her. I——"

"No, my lady," said Silvain. "I have not given her to any one because she was not mine to give. I have no right over the Lady Clarissa."

Beatrice made a parody of a royal gesture of refusal.

"The —— take you, you will be noble," said she. " 'No, my princess'," she mimicked Silvain's voice, " 'I have won you but I will not wear you. I have no right. Do not cry. It is true you do not interest me. But no one does except myself. I am a hero and I never forget it.' "

And for the third time Silvain said:

"No, my lady, I did not win the Lady Clarissa. I did not deliver her. There was a man before me, her own knight, Sir Louis Bonivard. I had only to guide them here."

That startled her. She stared at him incredulous.

"Bonivard?" she repeated. "One of the Bonivards of Geneva? The girl had him for her lover! And you brought them here? Now why?"

Silvain smiled.

"Why, I trusted the Lord Lodovico to be ready to guard his frontier. And ready he was."

Beatrice laughed.

"Yes, Lodovico is ready. That is his way. But I do not think he was ready for this. What is she like, your Clarissa?"

"She is a gracious lady and brave."

"Is that all? Poor wench; what a portrait! If that were the best of her I could understand. But I would not trust you to know whether a woman is black or white. Come, let us see the lass and her lad."

She clapped her hands for a servant and gave orders that Clarissa and Bonivard should be brought to sup with her, and glided out of the room.

When she came back she was mighty fine in a low dress of crimson with sapphires in her yellow hair, at her girdle and in a star upon her bosom. She made Silvain give his arm to her down the stairs, and so together they came into the hall where Bonivard and Clarissa waited, looking like two children, and shabby children, before her studied beauty and her splendors. For Clarissa was slight and small and dark, a graceful, pretty girl but outshone into insignificance by the maturity and the glowing color of the older woman, and Bonivard had the awkwardness of youth and no skill to hide that he was ill at ease.

Beatrice chose to make the worst of them. She was all condescension, all sympathy, and so contrived that they should show how nervous they were, how uncomfortable in the elaborate luxury of Binasco. Not a word, not a look of mockery came from her and yet Silvain new well enough that she was mocking them and him and, having no recourse, could only hope that Clarissa did not know.

Bonivard put an end to it.

"You will pardon us, my lady," he started up. "It is late and in the morrow we have far to go."

Beatrice smiled.

"That is true, sir. You have very far to go. And you must start tomorrow? Well, it is your choice. If I do not see you again, I wish you a pleasant journey."

Clarissa made a shy curtsey and out they went.

"And you, sir—" Beatrice turned to Silvain—"will you go with them?"

"I think they do not need me."

"Fie, how can you forsake her!"

"And I hope that the Lord Lodovico has other ventures of honor for me."

"By ——, it is very possible!" she cried. "Well, he will be here tomorrow."

* * *

AND in the morning early Silvain heard trumpets sound and saw Lodovico ride in with a guard, tired men on tired horses, travel-stained.

Silvain dressed himself quickly and made for the warden's tower. A man-at-arms stood sentry at the foot of the stair, but he was taken up to the council chamber. It was empty and he had long to wait and then came not Lodovico but Beatrice, Beatrice in a loose gown with a golden plait hanging over each shoulder to her bosom.

"And what do you want of my lord that you are in such haste to seek him?" She looked at Silvain curiously. "Greedy dogs come scurrying when they hear the master's step. But to give you justice, there is no greed in you."

"You have always given me more than justice. I am come to tell him what I have done."

"He knows, my friend. Lodovico always knows. But wait and see him. He is well pleased with you."

Lodovico came in, bathed and perfumed, in a loose gown like his wife's and indeed not unlike a woman in spite of his leanness. For he came with little mincing steps, he held out both hands and took Silvain's and patted them, his voice was soft and caressing:

"It is good to see you, Silvain. The sun shines on me this morning. Forgive us, you find us like homely folk. But I could not wait for ceremony when they told me it was you. And she—" he smiled upon his wife—"she is so full of you I am jealous, I promise you. You are her hero, her paladin. There, sit down, man, and let me hear you tell your tale." But he did not wait to hear, he went on talking. "By my faith, I cannot blame her. It was a miracle, a master stroke. I——"

"And Pavia is ours today," said Beatrice quietly.

"Yours, my lord?" Silvain said.

"Oh, that was Ercole's part. He came down upon the rogues that hunted you and drove them helter-skelter. The old knave Carlo had sent the best of his men out after you. There was fortune! Who could have counted on that? I vow you bring me luck, Silvain."

"I think you counted on it, my lord. You had an army ready."

"My friend, it was to save you if you were in danger. I praise God that they were in time to bring you off. But indeed God has ruled all for good."

"Ercole broke into Pavia, my lord?"

"Yes, oh yes. He beat those fellows who hunted you and chased them and came into the town on their heels. And——"

"And he had infantry behind him to hold fast what he won. You thought of everything, my lord."

Lodovico rubbed his hands.

"It has gone well, it has gone well," he chuckled. "But let me hear your story. You were magnificent."

"Not I, my lord. It is Louis Bonivard who delivered the lady." And Silvain told of the rescue, making Bonivard the hero.

"By my honor, it is a romance, a love story!" Lodovico chuckled. "And so you give him the lady, Silvain?"

"She has given herself, my lord. I have no right in her."

"Now, that is noble," Lodovico purred. "That is the grand gesture. I hope he is worth it! What manner of man is he, this Bonivard?"

"An oaf," said Beatrice. "A calf in love."

Lodovico laughed.

"A true Swiss soldier boy! It is wonderful what a nose the rogues have for a purse. Oh, Silvain, Silvain, here is an end to romance."

"He is a simple, honest gentleman, my lord. What will you do with him?"

"I? Oh, my friend, I have nothing for him. What does he want?"

"As I think he wants nothing but his lady. But Pavia is hers."

"Surely, surely. She will hold Pavia as a fief of Milan. She is in my wardship. I shall be ready to marry her to a man who can give me loyal service." He sighed and shook his head. "Why should I hide it, Silvain? I hoped that man would be you. It is why I sent you on this venture. And you have done well and more than well. You have won her. Why not wear her?"

"Bonivard," said Silvain. "She is all for Bonivard." And he looked keenly at Lodovico. "I do not take another man's woman."

"She has a rich inheritance," Lodovico purred. "She is worth taking. Who is Lord of Pavia and stands by me will be a great man in Italy in the war that comes. When I march with the King of France on Florence and Naples, the Lord of Pavia has much to win."

"I ride to win honor and fortune," Silvain said and he looked at Lodovico and looked down. "But she lives for Bonivard."

"What is Bonivard?" Beatrice cried. "My page is more of a man. If she is worth anything, she is worth something better."

"You tempt me," said Silvain in a low voice. "But what of Bonivard? He troubles me."

He started up and paced moodily to and fro. Beatrice and Lodovico looked at each other, and his dark face smiled and she shrugged her shoulders and nodded and turned with a sneer on her lip to watch Silvain.

"The fair Clarissa lives for Bonivard," Lodovico purred. "It is unfortunate. But she is young and he will not live forever." Silvain checked and turned. "Men do not live forever in prison. Men who are in the way."

Silvain's sword flashed. He struck down at Lodovico's head, struck once and with the flat of the blade. He whirled round on Beatrice.

"Make no sound, do not stir," he said, "or this is his death."

And as he spoke Lodovico slipped from his chair and slid to the floor in a heap.

"All is well, lady," Silvain said gently. "This is only a swoon yet. But my sword has a point too. Do what I bid or it finds his heart. Open the door to that inner room."

She looked at him a moment and she was as pale as he, then glided across the room and flung the door wide. Silvain saw an empty bed-chamber.

"Halt there," he said and gathered Lodovico in his arms and strode past her and laid the senseless man on the bed. "Lady, you must call a servant, you must tell him that Louis Bonivard and his Clarissa are to be given horses and set free to go where they will. This you will say in the council chamber and there you will stay. For I shall be here by the Lord Lodovico until they are safe beyond the castle and if you give the alarm here in your bed he dies."

"And what then, fool?" she said in a low voice. "What shall save you then?"

"What will save you, lady? For I have many devices yet. I might kill you too. I might swear that you bade me kill him."

"You would not dare!" she cried; but she looked at him and saw that only his lips were smiling and his eyes cold and fierce. "My ——, you have no shame. This is a dastard's trick."

"Let it be what it will. I do not care for myself nor for you. I think of the two you sent me to betray. Do as I bid you. Go!"

She looked at him again and glided out of the room, and he stood on guard over Lodovico. After a moment he heard her clap her hands and call a servant and send for the seneschal and then:

"Oh, you are slow, Roderigo, you are slow. My lord bids you set the Swiss knight and his lady free. Give them their horses and let them go. See to it quickly."

Her dress rustled into the bed chamber again. She came to Silvain, she looked at his set stern face, she looked down at her husband and touched his brow.

"His soul is still in his body," Silvain said. "You have served him well."

She turned away and went to the window. In a while the sound of horses came from the courtyard. She held out her hand and beckoned to Silvain. He came to her side and saw Bonivard and Clarissa mount and ride out and away.

She drew a long breath, she turned to Silvain and smiled.

"Well, my knight errant? And now?"

Silvain put up his sword.

"It is finished," he said.

"Oh, but you had many devices. Come, what device have you now? You may kill him yet before help comes. You may kill me too. Be swift!"

"I promised you his life for theirs. He is safe."

"You are wise!" she sneered. "Here are a hundred men to beat you down when they find my lord is stricken."

"That I know well. I stand here to die."

"Oh, you are humble at last. You will kneel and ask mercy now."

"Not I. I ask nothing. You and your lord, you sent me out to bring a woman into your power. You tempted me to betray her and my friend. Well, I have saved them, but you made me strike down a naked man to do it and threaten his wife with death and shame. You have made me play the dastard to beat you. I thank you. I ask nothing of you."

"You have saved them!" she said and she laughed. "He saves others; himself he can not save. By ——, you shall take something of me. Go with your life, go."

She swept out; she called down the stair—

"Ho, there! Sir Silvain's horses! Swift, swift!"

Silvain stood a moment, then strode forward and met her face to face. He knelt and kissed her hand.

"Forgive me, lady, I have done you a wrong in my heart. It is you who have the honor of the day and I am shamed."

But she laughed.

"Oh, fool, fool!" she said and the echo of her laughter was with him as he went.

MESSIRE THIBAUT fidgeting for fear in the courtyard was more afraid when he saw his master's face. For once in his life Messire Thibaut dared not speak. Their horses were brought and they mounted and rode out of that castle of Binasco, and Thibaut crossed himself and muttered prayers, but Silvain dashed on as fast as his horse could gallop.

"He rides like a man who flees from ——," Thibaut communed with himself, "and like a man who has been in —— he looks. Pity me, where is he taking me now?"

For at the first crossroads Silvain struck off to the east away from Milan and still drove his horse on till Thibaut cried out—

"Have mercy, lord! We can not hold this pace."

But Silvain made him no answer, nor checked. After a while they saw Bonivard and Clarissa ahead and Bonivard looked back and when he saw who they were drew rein.

But Silvain shouted at him—

"Forward, forward, make your best speed, forward!" and when he came up with them, "By my faith, you must do better than this, Louis. You should have been twenty miles away. Forward, forward!"

"What now?" cried Bonivard. "Are they hunting us again?"

"Be sure of it," Silvain said. "Every man Lodovico can mount."

"This is mad." Bonivard stared at him. "When I called for my horse this morning they said I was a prisoner and I found a guard at my door. Then they told me we were free to go and brought our horses and opened the gates. Now you say the man means to capture us again. Why, he changes like a weathercock."

"It was not Lodovico who set you free. It was the Lady Beatrice of her mercy. For she is noble and gracious. But when Lodovico knows of it he will use all his strength to seize you. And I think by now he knows. Ride, ride!"

"Lodovico did not know? How should he not know?"

"That was a trick I played upon him, and a shameful trick. God in heaven, must we talk? Your lady is free today. See to it she is free tomorrow. That is your work."

Bonivard's honest face lowered.

"I do not understand!" he grumbled. "It was you who brought us to Lodovico. You are his man. And now, if this is true, you have betrayed him."

"God in heaven, I know it," Silvain cried. "I am shamed, do what I will. But you—" he looked at Bonivard—"by my faith, it is not you who should tell me so."

Then Clarissa cried out—

"Oh, my lord, you have no shame in this."

"Let it be," Silvain said. "I do as I can."

So they rode on in silence, through the hot Italian noon. Bonivard had chosen the road which strikes across the plain to the passes beyond Turin, the shortest way to the mountains for a man who dared not go by Milan.

"When we are in the hills we are safe," he said, but the hills were far away.

Having made a dozen miles from the castle, Silvain was content to ride a slower pace.

"We have something in hand, I hope. Now let us nurse the horses and keep it."

But they had ridden their horses out before he would halt. It was a squalid lonely village which received them. As soon as they had found quarters, he took Messire Thibaut to seek fresh horses. The village had nothing but oxen and mules.

"It is as well as it is, lord." Thibaut shrugged. "We could do no more this day. The woman must rest or she will die."

"Lodovico will not rest," Silvain said.

"But his horses can do no more than our horses," Thibaut protested.

Silvain did not argue it. He knew what he would do if he were Lodovico, send messengers to every town in his rule to set mounted men scouring all the roads to Switzerland. He looked for fresh pursuit from every side.

Back to the stable he went and used his horsemaster's skill on the weary beasts, and through the night Thibaut and he kept watch and watch, and before the dawn he roused Bonivard and Clarissa and they took the road again.

In the morning twilight they saw the walls of a town and shunned it, striking away across country to join the road beyond, and this they did safely though it was slow work over the sodden fields, and their caution was justified. For they came out upon the road again beyond a picket of horsemen who shouted a challenge.

Silvain turned in the saddle and saw Lodovico's colors.

"Peace be with you," he cried. "We are the Duke of Savoy's men. We ride to Turin."

That held the horsemen a moment who talked together and again shouted to them to halt.

"Now ride, brother, ride," Silvain said, and dashed on.

They rode lighter than those men-at-arms; they were better mounted, though their horses were jaded and they kept their lead. But the men-at-arms rode hard and a troop thundered on behind them.

Bonivard ranged alongside Silvain.

"They will ride us down in the end," he muttered. "What hope is there if Lodovico takes us again?"

"There is none for you or me, brother. For her, I can not tell."

"If I am to die I will die fighting," said Bonivard.

Silvain smiled.

"I shall be with you, brother. We will turn on them together and hold them some little while. It may be she will win free, God be kind to her."

"What are you saying?" Clarissa cried.

"Ride, lady, ride," Silvain said. "You must not be taken for our honor's sake."

"Give me your dagger, Louis," she cried. "I will not be taken alive."

Bonivard came to her side and loosed his dagger and she put it in her bosom.

"Live while I live," he said.

"Oh, it is cruel, it is cruel," she cried.

They were riding through a flat country of many rivers, there was no hope in turning off the road and the road lay straight and the men-at-arms held on behind in close order.

In a little while they saw a cloud of dust ahead and as they drew nearer it broke into gleams of steel.

"My God, here is the end," Bonivard groaned. "We are taken now. Come, my lord," and he checked his horse to turn.

But Silvain cried—

"Ride on, man, ride. These are not Milanese. I see the golden lilies."

And he stood in his stirrups and shouted—

"France! France!"

FOR through the dust came a gleam of the French banner. An order rang out, the squadron halted, the lances came down to the charge, a knight rode out alone.

"Who are you that come upon us?" He held up his hand. "Halt there!"

But Silvain dashed on and "Bayard!" he cried.

"God's grace, you are Silvain de St. Lo. In a good hour, my lord."

"Silvain I am. And it is God who brought you, my brother. Here is a lady hunted for her life. Let her pass and guard her, I pray you."

"Why, you bring me honor."

Bayard turned and called to his men.

Through the French lances Clarissa and Bonivard rode on and the ranks closed behind them and the Milanese horsemen, seeing that rampart of steel bar their way, checked and halted in disorder.

Bayard called to them—

"Who are you that ride against the banner of France? Go your way, I clear this road for King Charles."

Then the captain of Lodovico's men cried out—

"We are friends of France. We serve the Lord of Milan. He has sent us to take these rogues we hunt. Give us them, sir, and you will do your king good service. For my Lord Lodovico is his friend, you know it well."

"I do not know you," said Bayard. "But this I know: You have hunted a fair lady and this good knight of France. And now you stand in my way and I lead the vanguard of King Charles." He turned in his saddle. "Advance, banner," he shouted. "In close order. Charge!"

But Lodovico's men did not wait for the word. They turned and made off at speed.

"You have saved me, brother," Silvain said. "But I have brought trouble on you."

"Good faith, here is none," Bayard laughed.

"The king comes to join with Lodovico. And Lodovico will not forgive this day's work. He hunted this lady and her knight because he has stolen her inheritance. He hunted me because I saved them. And he is venomous."

"Why man, what care I? I have done right. Do not fear for me. Bayard can guard himself."

"Be wary, brother. Your king is allied to a fiend. I would to God I could ride with you. Fare you well."

Bayard stopped his horse.

"You must go guard the lady? So be it. But come back to us, Silvain. Here is a fair field of honor and no better knight of us all than you."

"I dare not," Silvain said hoarsely. "Oh, my brother, I would give my life and be glad to ride under the golden lilies with you. But you go to serve Lodovico, you and France. There is no honor in that, Bayard."

He turned his horse and rode after Clarissa and Bonivard. Messire Thibaut was waiting for him; Messire Thibaut had sent them on by a crossroad which climbed up toward Novara and the hills, and he caught them up where they rode close, chattering like children. Clarissa turned to him and took him into their talk prettily, all happiness, and they could not make enough of him.

"But your eyes are behind you," she cried at last. "Oh, my lord, is there danger for us yet?"

"We are safe enough," Silvain said.

"See the sun on the snows, Clarissa," Bonivard cried. "We shall be in the mountains tomorrow."

"There is only sunshine before us," she smiled. "But why do you look back, Silvain?"

Silvain pointed down the road in the plain. It gleamed in a long array of steel.

"See, there is the army of France marching to war, and a knight of France am I, and I may not ride under her banner nor fight for her. I am a lonely man and my heart is desolate."

SKIPPER JOE, RETIRED

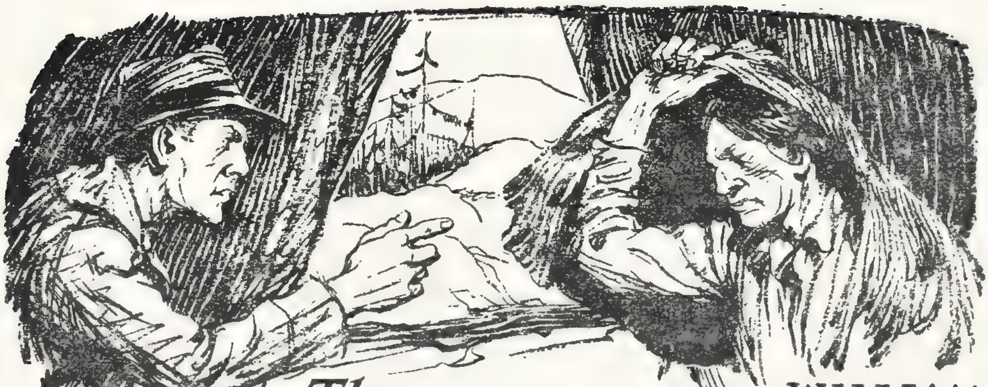
by Earl W. Scott

EVERY mornin' bright or fair,
Skipper Joe, he takes the air.
He rolls down the quay like he trod the deck
Of his bark at sea, the ol' *John Peck.*

Standin', he scans the distant sea,
An' clouds of smoke drift off to lee
From the stubby pipe betwixt 'is teeth
An' the gulls swirl up from the bar beneath
An' halo 'is head with its cropped white hair.
His hard hand shades 'is eyes from the glare
As he notes the barks in the offing, where
The tall ships idle at anchor there.

He knows the tramps an' knows 'em well,
An' the whalers whose stinkin' decks are hell;
Or the line ships gleamin', white an' fine,
Their bows a-glistenin' jewels of brine
As they weigh their anchors, "Yo, heave ho,"
When the tide is right on the bar below.

Some day the quay'll miss ol' Joe,
A-watchin' the sea that he loved so;
For 'is sailor soul, outbound'll ride,
In a white ship's sail on the ebbing tide;
An' the gulls'll hover round and round,
Castin' their shadders on the ground—
Mem'ries, brave, of souls at sea,
Of sailor-men that usta be.



The MEEKNESS of MUG-WA

by WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

Author of "The Cannikin Clink Clink," "Fair Weather Friends," etc.

JOHN MERNE drove his canoe upon the bank in a way to threaten its frail sides. There was snap in his manner and a glitter in his eye. At an imperious gesture from him, two Dog-Rib warriors stepped forward and lifted his birchbark out of the water. Half a dozen of them had seen him coming up the river and had gathered at the landing. Without wasting a glance or a word on them, Merne strode up the bank to the teepees.

Beside the first of these squatted a young warrior with an exceedingly solemn expression on his smoky face. He held between his knees a small tin box from which, by means of a crank, he was grinding out a raucous tune. Merne stopped and looked at him so stonily that the Dog-Rib ceased.

"Where come?" Merne demanded, pointing to the contraption.

The Indian opened his lips to speak, bethought himself, and remained stubbornly silent. Merne reached down, grasped the tin box, and hurled it over the warriors into the river. It fell with a splash.

"Papoose!" he growled over his shoulder, striding toward a teepee larger than the others.

A tall, dignified Indian of forty rose to greet him as he entered without ceremony. Merne overlooked the outstretched hand with a cold stare. Surprized and nonplused, the Dog-Rib sub-chief let his hand sink. Merne sat down and motioned to the other to sit.

"You did not expect me, Mug-wa?" he asked in the dialect.

"Or I would have had food ready," the Indian politely answered.

"I came to talk, not eat," Merne said tersely. "It will be well for you to listen to me with both ears. I just tossed into the river a can of noise, so that you could hear me better."

"I am hearkening," said Mug-wa in wonderment.

"Last fall," Merne began, clipping his words short, "when the caribou migration passed to the eastward and you missed the killing, you came to me and asked for food and clothes. Your hands were empty, but I gave you three canoe loads. Then later, in the Moon of Ice, you sent two dog teams down the river with the word that there was no food in the lodges of the Male Otters, and that your women and children were even then starving. What, Mug-wa, was my answer?"

"You loaded my sleds and sent them back, with still another of your own."

"Your memory is good," Merne said with sarcasm. "But perhaps you have forgotten how I was paid."

"With a promise."

"Of what?"

"That you would be paid in furs. That our catch of the winter would be yours."

"And I have received the price of one canoe load."

The Indian was silent for a moment. He bowed his head slightly.

"I am sorry it is true. You did what no other of the traders, not even at the Big Post, would have done for us in our black night of need. But the winter was too frozen. Not in twenty years have the Male Otters failed thus on the fur path. Early in the Moon of Flying Frost the ptarmigan and rabbit disappeared; and with them went the fox and marten. We hunted for food and found none. Our fur paths were long; and we traveled them in storm and still cold. But we took few furs. Not the price of one canoe load of food and clothes, though we have given them all to you."

Merne interrupted with raised hand.

"That is a lie. If you had secured but three musquash pelts all winter and had brought those three to me, I would have taken your hand a minute ago. I would have said, as I have said to the Male Otters in times before:

" 'Wait until the Manitou sends a good year.'

"But you did not bring me all your furs, as the promise ran you would do."

"May I speak?" said Mug-wa with a show of spirit, looking up and meeting his visitor's eye.

"You will listen!" Merne retorted. "You are a fool to think you can deceive me. I know your littlest action. I should not deal with you again. I should not take your hand. I should even forget your name and call you 'The Liar!' "

"We gave you what furs we had," said the Indian.

"That," Merne repeated with emphasis, "is a lie! This morning down the river I passed the tent of man Sharpley. He was preparing to leave and go back down the river again. A Male Otter was helping him."

"He was not of my band."

"Another lie. He was one of the men who came with the sleds to me last winter. Now man Sharpley gets his furs and your warrior gets a can of noise and a belly-full of poison. Where did that rattlebox come from, if not the tent of this man Sharpley from the Edmonton City?"

Mug-wa was silent for a moment.

"It is true," he said. "The Male Otters have traded some furs to this city man, this Sharpley. I could not stop them. You would not give them conversation water and other things, as other traders do. I spoke to them of the promise we have made to you, but their ears were deaf. I am their chief; but am I so bitterly to blame for their breaking a promise against my command?"

Merne's eyes had been glancing about the teepee.

"Another lie. You load the blame upon the shoulders of your warriors. You said not one word to them. Nay, more——"

He looked at a wolfskin rug, thrust his hand beneath it and brought out a new long rifle. He turned it over, for Mug-wa's inspection, and put it under its hiding again.

"It was given to me by Piwagasi, my warrior," said the sub-chief lamely.

"You are a brother to a jay-bird," Merne retorted. "You have a canoe, tricked out in black; the only one on the river. Three times this week that canoe has gone downstream and stopped at the tent of man Sharpley."

The Indian's head bowed until he was talking to the ground.

"It is true," he confessed after a minute of silence. The words came from deep in his throat. "I did visit man Sharpley three times and traded with him. But the furs which he got were worthless fox pelts. He is a city man. He does not know a fisher skin from a dog hide."

"But he knows the skin game," said Merne in English, for better vigor. "——, he didn't leave the city an' come up here for his health, did he?"

Mug-wa shook his head.

"May I speak?" he asked, this time humbly.

"You will listen!" Merne blazed. He continued in the dialect. "You have said that you traded the valuable furs to me and to him the worthless ones. That is a lie, like the other words you have spoken. *I* got the cheap pelts; *he* the costly ones."

He waited a moment for the Indian's denial.

"May I speak?" Mug-wa repeated humbly.

"You will listen!" Merne reiterated. "This week, while the river was still running full of ice, you took two black foxes down to the tent of man Sharpley!"

Mug-wa looked up quickly.

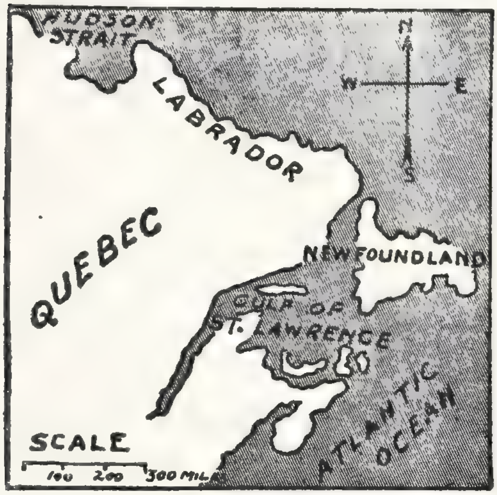
"Ho!" he managed to exclaim.

"Not only did you trade him your own black foxes," Merne continued, smacking a fist into his palm, "but you told him that you would send your men to the Antler-Hares who had a black fox; and to the

Windy Lake Dog-Ribs who had another. So man Sharpley has four black foxes that should be mine!"

"It is true," the Indian admitted, almost in a groan.

Merne cocked a finger of scorn at his host. "You have the tongue of a jay bird and the heart of a carcajou," he rasped. "I have the eye of a mole, or I would have seen this in the ten years you have traded with me. But there is one thing which I have seen and you have been blind to."



Mug-wa looked up without speaking, impassive under the other's tirade.

"It is," continued Merne, "that a man may grow a face full of long whiskers and have a head of different colored hair and change his voice till it sounds like a ptarmigan bleat, but he is still the same man."

"How!" uttered Mug-wa, mystified.

"Listen!" Merne bent forward. "Almost every summer you have gone beyond the Fort down the river to the cities of the white man. Two summers ago, when you went, you had money with you from the sale of a good fur year. You came back with nothing. I heard about that, though you were ashamed to tell me. Why was it?"

"I learned to play a thing called poker," said Mug-wa with another groan.

"True, you learned the game called poker," said Merne, with a short laugh. "And the man who taught you the game is——"

Mug-wa glanced up quickly. A look of amazement seemed to spread over his face. He grunted.

"Wh-h-at? Do I hear straight talk?"

"Straighter than your promises," Merne retorted. "I make no mistake. I know. The man who taught you in the city is Sharpley!"

The Indian stared at his visitor for a short minute. He seemed unable to believe what he heard. Merne looked him out of countenance. With a gesture of infinite self-contempt, Mug-wa drew his skin cape over his head.

"If I should tell others," Merne continued in somewhat softer tone, "that the man who tricked Mug-wa in the city, followed him almost to his hunting-grounds and tricked him again out of four black foxes for a canoe load of child things, with maybe a rifle or two, the squaws would set you to making *babische*."

From beneath the skin cape came a groan.

"Because you have been to the Outside, you have boasted that you can match trick for trick with the white men," said Merne. "There is excuse for your learning to play poker; but here beside your hunting-grounds you should be the fox and man Sharpley the fool. You are a babe, still pink!"

Another groan.

"You have traded those foxes and they are lost. You can not get them back, though they would have paid your debt to me and left you enough to buy food for a winter. You have twice been tricked by one man, who does not know a fisher skin from a dog hide. And you have lost your honor when you broke your promise to me."

Merne rose to his feet and stood silent till the sub-chief ceased groaning.

"I have wasted a day to come and tell you that you are a fool, Mug-wa," he concluded. "I have always dealt honestly with you, and before this you have dealt honestly with me. I will give you a chance. Next winter you will easily catch furs enough to fulfill your promise. After this lesson you will bring them to me. I am going to make you send me four warriors and two canoes, to take my furs to the Fort before you go back to your lodges in the north hills. Send them to-morrow."

"They will come," said the muffled and meek voice of Mug-wa. "My almost-brother may not now believe my words, but I had intended to send four men to him, and word of my trading with man Sharpley."

Snorting disbelief John Merne strode back to his canoe. The Dog-Ribs after a look at his face, stepped out of his way. Around the first bend of the river he drew a deep breath and grinned.

"Phew!" he told himself, like one with the habit of solitude. "Didn't I lay him out! Hated to talk to him like that. Mug-wa's been a good feller. —— shame, though, about them fox. For half a cent I'd high-jack this Sharpley duck an' take 'em away from him. But it's done now; no gettin' away from that. ——, I thought Mug-wa had brains!"

When he was past the first white water and over-falls, he broke into "A la Claire Fontaine," and paddled swiftly down the river. Between verses he shook his head and ejaculated—

"——, I thought he had brains!"

THE next day at noon Sharpley paddling his canoe clumsily, landed at Merne's one-building station. Besides outfit, he had one small pack which he carried with him, as if to keep it safe, when he came up toward Merne. His manner was exultant.

"Howd'y?" he began.

Merne looked at him without answering.

"Got any grub?" Sharpley demanded. "I'm out."

"I have," Merne answered. "But I'm careful who I give it to."

Sharpley's grin became ugly.

"Meanin' what?"

"You're poachin' on my territory when you come up here tradin' your gimcracks an' rot-gut to t' Injuns."

"I guess they're anybody's pluckin', ain't they? Youse don't own 'em, do youse?"

"No, but I got some right to t' fur they caught last winter. I own that pack you got in your hand."

"T' —— youse do!" Sharpley snorted.

"But I wouldn't have t' —— things *now*," Merne snapped. "Suppose you mosey along."

Sharpley opened his lips for one foul word, addressed straight at Merne. The latter jumped in and caught him on the jaw. The pack went spinning as Sharpley reeled backward. Merne hit him again, flush on the chin; and Sharpley tumbled. With a hand twisted into his coat collar, Merne assisted him to the canoe.

"See how quick you can get out of sight," he said huskily, flinging the pack in after him. "An' don't come up this way ag'in You belong in an alley, not in a woods. That's warnin'. Get!"

Sharpley went.

He was barely out of sight when two Dog-Rib canoes and four of Mug-wa's men came down the river. The oldest jumped out of his boat and stepped up to Merne.

"Mug-wa said we are to stay with you until you have no further need of us."

Merne nodded.

"Also, Mug-wa sends word of greeting and a message," concluded the Indian, taking a small can from his shoulder-pack. "He said that yesterday the words of his white brother smote him like hailstones so that he could not speak."

John Merne turned the can over, pried off the lid and looked inside, expecting to find a written message there, for the sub-chief read and wrote creditably. But the can was empty. Puzzled, Merne thrust two fingers inside. Nothing but some black stain.

Mystified, he turned the can over again. There was some gilt charactery, by way of a label, on the outside. He read it. Re-read it with a gasp.

EHLENBERGER & SCHNITTKIND
Manufacturing Chemists

ANILAC

Natural Black Dye for Wool, Cloth, Hair, Furs,
etc., etc.

OM

A Six-Part Story—Part III

by TALBOT MUNDY

Author of "Mohamed's Tooth," "The Nine Unknown," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

WHEN Cottswold Ommony, forester in the Civil Service of India, drifted into the die-hard club at Delhi the members straightway began to gossip about him. They recalled that Jack Terry, the M. D., married Ommony's younger sister Elsa twenty years before; that an American pork packer named Marmaduke persuaded Terry to become medico at the Buddhist mission which Marmaduke had established at Tilgaun; that Ommony was co-trustee with a red-headed American spinster named Hannah Sanburn who was head of the mission and with a Tibetan Ringding Gelong Lama whom Ommony had never seen; that his enemy, Jenkins, had just been appointed head of the forestry department and that Ommony had resigned.

As for Ommony, he said nothing; but pretty soon he got up and went to see his friend, John McGregor, his giant Irish wolf-hound Diana at heel. McGregor was head of the Secret Service. Their conversation developed interestingly. Jenkins had had Elsa hypnotized by the black-art swine Kananda Pal, robbed her of her mind and used her mental maladjustment as an excuse to break the engagement between them. Terry married her to save her and took her to a sacred place in the upper Abor country to have her cured. There the "Masters" live; there also is a sacred stone with magic properties. Terry and Elsa disappeared. That was twenty years ago.

McGregor also told Ommony that Miss Sanburn's adopted daughter had been robbed of a piece of crystal jade, the thief being murdered and the jade, as well as the adopted daughter, disappearing. Tin Lal, a Secret Service operative, recovered the jade and tried to sell it to Chutter Chand the jeweler. Through Chutter Chand's agency McGregor recovered the jade and since then had been importuned by a mysterious somebody to give it up. He thought that the jade might have something to do with the disappearance of the Terrys.

Suddenly hopeful of rescuing his sister, Ommony determined to inspect the Buddhist mission at Tilgaun as a pretext, then slip away on the desperate chance of penetrating the perilous unexplored upper Abor country, whence no stranger had ever returned.

Before starting he took the jade to his friend Chutter Chand, the jeweler. Chutter Chand said that in his opinion the jade had been broken off from a much larger piece and sensitized in very ancient times by a prehistoric race of superscientists, with the result that the stone reflects the whole of the holder's thought and character from the very day he was born. The jeweler added that he thought the "Masters" of the upper Abor guarded the forgotten secrets of the superscientists with the idea of letting them out a little at a time as the world was prepared to receive them. He was in abject terror, for a mysterious visitor had threatened him with death if he did not return the stone.

Just then an old Tibetan lama entered with his young *chela* or disciple in quest of the jade. He didn't get it. Ommony sent his wolf-hound Diana to trail them to their quarters when they left and himself made friends with the Hillman whom they had posted to shadow him. The Hillman said that his name was Dawa Tsering and that he came from Spiti, where they practise polyandry. The old lama, he said, was Tsiang Samdup, a name which startled Ommony. The disciple was Samding; "some call him San-fun-ho." Then he suddenly waxed uncommunicative and disappeared.

The dog Diana returned and led Ommony to the lamas' hiding-place, where Dawa Tsering tried to knife him in the dark. Diana bit the Hillman in the neck; Ommony took the knife away from him, and the Hillman cursed the lamas.

"They told me I could come to no harm if I obeyed them and said my prayers," he added. "Their magic is useless. Give me my knife and I will go back to the Hills."

Ommony gave Dawa Tsering the address of Mrs. Cornock-Campbell, where he was to be a guest at dinner, and told the Hillman to report there between ten and eleven that night, when the knife would be returned. Then he drove to McGregor's office, wrapped up the jade, addressed the package

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"Om," copyright, 1924, by Talbot Mundy.

to Miss Sanburn at Tilgaun and entrusted it to McGregor's most trusted operative, the Eurasian, Aaron Macaulay, for delivery.

When Dawa Tsering showed up for his knife he told them that the jade had been found on a man from Abor, who had come to the Tilgaun mission for medical treatment and had died there. The stone was stolen from Miss Sanburn by a mission girl, whom the Secret Service operative Tin Lal had subsequently murdered. Tsiang Samdup had promised Dawa Tsering a great reward for recovering it. During their stay in Delhi Dawa Tsering noticed that the lama was visited a good deal by "actor people."

Just then a letter was shoved under the door, and the messenger disappeared before any one could see who he was.

THE letter, which was signed by Tsiang Samdup, referred vaguely to the "Middle Way" and asked Ommony to take the jade to Tilgaun, "which is one stage of the journey to the place whence it came."

Ommony, provoked at Tsiang Samdup because the lama would not take Ommony into his confidence, determined not to play into the other's hands by preceding him to Tilgaun, but to trail him there, thus finding out what the other was up to on the road. Also Ommony made up his mind to find that "Middle Way," and find it without the aid of the Secret Service. If the latter took a hand, Ommony well knew the Way would be closed to him. He knew of course that the phrase as the lama used it might refer to its religious significance but most likely—indeed almost surely—meant an actual secret trail through India.

He bullied Dawa Tsering into leaving the lama's service and entering his own; then, accompanied by the Hillman and Diana, he departed to visit Benjamin the Jew, a merchant and money lender to whom he had once done a very great favor. Moved by gratitude, the merchant told him much. He learned first, that the lama "for certain reasons" was planning to take a troupe of actors north.

Then too he wormed it out of Benjamin that for the past fifteen years or more the merchant had been Tsiang Samdup's Delhi agent. The lama, it seems, always paid his bills in small bars of solid gold.

Finally after an enormous emotional struggle Benjamin confessed under seal of utter confidence that Tsiang Samdup's traffic with him was largely concerned with smuggling friendless little European girls—seven had been smuggled already—up into the lamaist country and with buying supplies for them. From Delhi they went up by the "Middle Way."

Ommony was shocked — disgusted — and even more determined to see this thing through. Seeing the contempt in Ommony's manner, Benjamin offered to help him into the Abor country, where Ommony could see for himself that neither Benjamin nor the lama had done anything but good for the little girls. This could easily be accomplished, because Maitraya, the leader of the lama's troupe of actors, was in Benjamin's debt. So Ommony disguised himself as a Bhat-Brahman — a caste of Brahman so high that it was beyond the reach of caste—and as such was introduced to Maitraya, under the name of Gupta Rao. Under protest Maitraya took "Gupta Rao" into his troupe as leading actor.

This business being arranged, the two actors drove off to meet the lama and his *chela*, who were attending the birthday party of Vasantasena, a courtezan who wielded more power secretly than a dozen maharajas did openly. There Ommony was surprized to learn that indirectly the piece of jade had passed from Aaron Macaulay's hands into those of Vasantasena. What a marvelous spy system the lama controlled! he reflected.

Vasantasena held out the jade temptingly.

"Give me your *chela* in exchange," she coaxed.

"No," replied the *chela* in a voice like a golden gong.

Vasantasena's eyes flashed, and her mood changed into savagery like a stirred snake's. She flung the stone at the lama straight and hard. He secreted it in his bosom imperturbably.

"Go," she ordered hoarsely. "You—and you—and you, dogs of actors!"

Unhurriedly the four left and entered a strange carriage at the gate, with the servants of Vasantasena pursuing them. But the pursuit was not in order to do them harm, but to beseech forgiveness and to beg them to accept gifts from their mistress, that her sacrilegious action might not prove ill-omened. However, their gifts and cries were ignored, and in silence the four drove off.

CHAPTER XII

"ALL THINGS END—EVEN CARRIAGE RIDES"

The man who knows he is ignorant is at no disadvantage if he permits a wise man to do the thinking; because the wise man knows that neither advantage to one nor disadvantage to another comes at all within the scope of wisdom, and he will govern himself accordingly. But he who seeks to outwit wisdom adds to ignorance presumption; and that is a complication that the gods do not love.—From the Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

THE heat inside the carriage was stifling. No breeze came through the slats that formed the sides, but they had the advantage that one could see out, and sufficient light streamed through to show the lama's face distinctly at close quarters. The lama sat perched on the rear seat with Samding beside him, both of them cross-legged like Buddhas; but the front seat was as narrow as a knifeboard, and in the space between there was hardly room for Ommony's and Maitraya's legs. Faces were so close that the utmost exercise of polite manners could hardly have prevented staring, and Ommony took full advantage of the circumstance.

But the lama seemed unconscious of being looked at, making no effort to avoid Ommony's eyes, although Samding kept his face averted and stared between the slats at the crowd on the sidewalks. The lama's eyes were motionless, fixed on vacancy somewhere through Ommony's head and beyond it; they were blue eyes, not brown, as might have been expected—blue aging into gray—the color of the northern sky on windy afternoons.

The horse clop-clopped along the paved street leisurely, the clink of a loose shoe adding a tantalizing punctuation to the rhythm, and a huge blowfly buzzed disgustingly until it settled at last on the lama's nose.

"That is not the right place," he remarked then in excellent English, and with a surprizingly deft motion of his right hand slapped the fly out through the slats.

He smiled at Ommony, who pretended not to understand him; for the most important thing at the moment seemed to be to discover whether or not the lama had guessed his indentity and, if not, to preserve the secret as long as possible. From a pouch at his waist that Benjamin had thoughtfully provided he produced *pan** and began to chew it—an offensive habit that he hated, but one that every Brahman practises. The lama spoke again, this time in Urdu.

"Flies," he said in a voice as if he were teaching school, "are like the evil thoughts that seem to come from nowhere. Kill them, and others come. They must be kept out, and their source looked for and destroyed."

"It is news to me," said Ommony in his best Bhat-Brahman tone of voice, "that people from Tibet know the laws of sanitation. Now *I* have studied them, for I lean to the modern view of things. Flies breed in dunghills and rotten meat, from larvae that devour the solids therein contained."

"Even as sin breeds in a man's mind from curiosity that devours virtue," said the lama.

He did not smile, but there was an inflection in his voice that suggested he had thought of smiling. Ommony improvised a perfectly good Brahman answer.

"Without curiosity progress would cease," he asserted, well knowing that was untrue but bent on proving he was some one he was not.

The lama knew Cottswold Ommony for a thoughtful man—for twenty years' correspondence must have demonstrated that—and, if not profound, at least acquainted with profundity; and it is men's expressions of opinion more often than mechanical mistakes that betray disguises, so he didactically urged an opinion that he did not entertain.

"Without curiosity, nine-tenths of sin would cease. The other tenth would be destroyed by knowledge," the lama replied.

Whereat he took snuff in huge quantities from a wonderful old silver box. It made Ommony and Maitraya sneeze, but he and Samding apparently were unaffected by it.

"Where are we going?" asked Ommony suddenly.

"I have disposed of curiosity."

The lama dismissed the question with one firm horizontal movement of his right hand.

"I have a servant to whom I must send a message," Ommony objected.

"The *chela* may take it."

Ommony glanced at Samding, and the calm eyes met his without wavering; yet he did not have the lama's trick of seeming to look through a person. Perhaps youth had something to do with that. His gaze betrayed interest in an object, whereas the lama's looked behind, beyond, as if he could see causes.

Ommony decided suddenly to fall in with that arrangement. There were obvious disadvantages, but it seemed more important to have Diana brought to him and to keep in touch with Dawa Tsering than to conceal his own identity, especially as there was not much hope of continuing to do the latter for long.

The inside of the carriage had become charged with concentrated thought, which, whatever else it may be, is *not* powerless stuff. Its proximity, like that of high-tension wires, induces activity in others, which is the phenomenon of personal magnetism and accounts for what is called "born leadership." The lama's, beyond question, was a high-power mind, whether for good or evil, and Ommony began to reconsider the situation, thinking furiously.

It would be absurd to pit his own comparatively untrained intellect against a mind that had probably improved on the lore of ages by intense and patient application. It would be as wise for a beginner to challenge an old hand at chess, or for a high-school senior to match experience with Edison. He had witnessed proof that the lama commanded a spy system perfectly capable of discovering even the secret moves of McGregor. The odds were therefore ten to one that he knew exactly who was sitting in the carriage facing him. He certainly would know as soon as he should see Diana; for Samding had read the name "Ommony" on Diana's collar in Chutter Chand's shop.

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*A preparation of betel-nut.

The letter from the lama had been delivered to Mrs. Cornock-Campbell's house, which was proof of careful shadowing, if of nothing else. Benjamin was the lama's secret agent as well as more or less openly his man of business. Viewed in all its bearings, it would be almost a miracle if the lama did not at least suspect the real identity of the Bhat-Brahman who sat chewing betel-nut in front of him.

And the lama now had the piece of jade for which ostensibly he had come all the way to Delhi. Moreover, he had known where it was, at least for several hours.

Then why did he continue to submit to being spied on? Why had he not, for instance, stepped into the carriage and driven away, leaving Ommony on the sidewalk outside Vasantasena's?

If the lama really did know who was sitting in the carriage with him the mystery was increased rather than clarified. One possible solution was that he intended to do murder at his own convenience.

And now there was the problem of Dawa Tsering and the dog.

He might have left the dog with McGregor and have had Dawa Tsering confined in the jail, but he would have lost two important allies by doing it. A man with a "knife" and a dog with a terrific set of teeth might turn out to be as good as guardian angels.

On the other hand, the lama might be planning to disappear along the mysterious "Middle Way," that baffles all detection. If so the dog and Dawa Tsering might be exceedingly useful in tracing him. If the offer to send Samding with a message were not a trick it would at least acquaint the dog thoroughly with Samding's smell.

Finally, as the carriage dawdled through the sunbaked, thronging streets, Ommony reached the conclusion that he had been guided by intuition when he gave orders to Dawa Tsering. A man who has lived in a forest for the greater part of twenty years and has studied native life and nature in the raw as methodically as Ommony had done, achieves a faith in intuition that persists in the face of much that is called evidence. He decided to carry on, at least one step further, trusting again to intuition that assured him he was not in serious danger and wondering whether the lama was not quite as puzzled as himself. He glanced at the lama's face, hoping to detect a trace of worry.

But the lama was asleep. He was sleeping as serenely as a child, with his head drooped forward and his shoulders leaning back into the corner. Samding made a signal not to waken him.

The carriage dawdled on. The lama stirred, glanced through the slats to find out where they were, and dozed away again. The streets grew narrower and then broadened into unpaved roads that wandered between high walls and shuttered windows, in a part of Delhi that Ommony knew only by hearsay and from books.

Here and there a Moslem minaret uprose above surrounding flat roofs, and trees peeped over the wall of a crowded cemetery. They were going northward, toward where the ruins of really ancient Delhi shelter thieves and jackals in impenetrable scrub and mounds of débris; a district where anything might happen and no official be a word the wiser.

Suddenly the carriage checked and turned between high walls into an alley with a gate at the farther end. The driver cried aloud with a voice like a prophet of despair announcing the end of all things; the double gate swung wide, not more than a yard in advance of the horse's nose; paved stones rang underfoot; the gates slammed shut; and the lama came to life, opening first one eye, then the other.

"All things end—even carriage-rides," he said in English, looking hard at Ommony.

But Ommony was still of the opinion it was better to pretend he did not understand that language.

Somebody opened the carriage door from outside—a Tibetan, all smiles and benedictions, robed like a medieval monk—who chattered so fast in a northern dialect that Ommony could not make head or tail of it. Samding cut short the flow of speech by pushing past him, followed by Maitraya. Ommony got out next, his eyes blinded for the moment by sunlight off the white stone walls of a courtyard; and before he could take in the scene the carriage containing the lama moved on again and disappeared through a gate under an arch in a barrack-like building; the gate was pulled shut after it by some one on the inside.

IT WAS a four-square courtyard, dazzlingly white, paved with ancient stones, surrounded on three sides by a cloister supported on wooden posts, on to which tall, narrow doors opened at unequal intervals. There was no attempt at ornament, but the place had a sort of stern dignity and looked as if it might originally have been a khan for northern travelers. The windows on the walls above the cloister roof were all shuttered with slatted blinds, and there were no human beings in evidence except Samding, Maitraya and the Tibetan who had opened the carriage door; but there were sounds of many voices coming from the shuttered window of a room that opened on the cloister.

Samding stood still, facing Ommony, silent, presumably waiting for the message he was to take. Ommony spoke in Urdu:

"Is this our destination? Or do we go elsewhere from here?"

"Here—until tomorrow or the next day," said the quiet voice.

"Do you know your way about Delhi? Can you find your way to Benjamin, the Jew's, in the Chandni Chowk? Will you take this handkerchief of mine and go to Benjamin's, where you will find a very big dog. Show the handkerchief to the dog, and let her smell it. She will follow you to this place."

Samding smiled engagingly but incomprehensibly; the smile seemed to portend something.

"Speak louder," he suggested, as if he were deaf and had not heard the message.

Ommony raised his voice almost to a shout; he was irritated by the enigmatic smile. His words as he repeated what he had said, echoed under the cloister—and were answered by a deep-throated bay he could have recognized from among the chorus of a dog pound.

A door in the cloister that stood ajar flew wide, and Diana came bounding out like a crazy thing, yelping and squealing delight to see her master, almost knocking him down and smelling him all over from head to foot to make sure it was really he inside the unaccustomed garments. And a moment later Dawa Tsering strode out through the same door, knife and all, blinking at the sunlight, looking half-ashamed.

Ommony quieted Diana, stared sharply at Dawa Tsering and turned to question Samding. The *chela* was gone. Ommony just caught sight of his back as he vanished through a door under the cloister, twenty feet away. He questioned the Tibetan, using Prakrit, but the man appeared not to understand him. Dawa Tsering strolled closer, grinning, trying to appear self-confident.

"O Gupta Rao," he began.

But Ommony turned his back.

"Do you know where we are?" he asked Maitraya.

"Certainly. This is where my troupe was to assemble. Let us hope they are all here and that the Jew has delivered the costumes."

"O you, Gupta Rao," Dawa Tsering insisted, laying a heavy hand on Ommony's shoulder from behind to call attention to himself, "listen to me. That dog of yours is certainly a devil, and the Jew is a worse devil, and that man there—" he pointed at the Tibetan— "is the father of them both! You had not left the Jew's store longer than a man would need to scratch himself, when that fellow entered and talked with the Jew.

"I also talked with the Jew; I bade him supply me with garments according to your command, and two pairs of blankets and a good, heavy yak-hair cloak; and there were certain other things I saw that I became aware I needed. But the Jew said that this fellow had brought word that you had changed your mind regarding me, and that I was to go elsewhere with *him*. I gave him the lie. I told him who was father of them both, and what their end would be, and they said many things.

"So I helped myself to a yak-hair cloak, a good one, and lo, I have it with me; and I also picked out one pair of blankets of a sort such as are not to be had in Spiti; and with those and the cloak and some trifles I encumbered myself, so that neither hand was free.

"And while I was looking to see what else was important to a man of your standing and my needs, lo, the Jew took the socks you had left behind and gave them to this rascal; and the son of unforgivable offenses showed them to the dog, who forthwith followed him, notwithstanding that I called her many names. He led her out of the shop, and I after him with both arms full, and the Jew after me because of the blankets and what not else.

"And lo, there was a cart outside having four wheels and sides like the shutters of a te-rain, only not made to slide up and down. And the door was at the rear. And thereinto he led the dog, she following the socks, and I after both of them to bring the dog back. And lo, no sooner was I within the cart—not more than my head and shoulders were within it—than two men like this one, only bigger, seized me and wrapped me in my own blankets and bound me fast, taking my knife.

"So they brought me to this place, where they dragged me into that room yonder and released me, returning my knife to me and saying such was your order. And if they had not returned my knife I would have fought them; but as they did return it and said it was your order, and as the dog appeared satisfied, because they threw the socks to her to guard, it seemed to me there might be something in it after all. Did you give such an order? Or shall I slay these men?"

"Have you been here before?" asked Ommony.

"Oh, yes; two or three times. This is not a bad place, and there is lots to eat, well buttered, with plenty of onions. This is a place where they think the Lama Tsiang Samdup is of more importance than a bellyful. But they eat notwithstanding—thrice daily—and much. But tell me: Did you give such an order—to have me brought to this place?"

Ommony had a flash of inspiration.

"The man mistook the order," he answered. Maitraya was listening; he did not want to take Maitraya into confidence. "I will tell you later what I intend to do about it. Meanwhile keep silence, keep close to the dog, and keep an eye on me."

But Maitraya was growing more than curious, although he did not understand the Prakrit dialect that Dawa Tsering used.

"What is a Bhat-Brahman doing with such a servant?"he asked, stroking his chin and cocking his head to one side like a parrot that sees sugar.

To have attempted explanations would only have involved Ommony in statements still more unexplainable; he fell back on the excuse that Benjamin invented:

"You were told. He attends to my little affairs of the heart. Isn't the real puzzle, what is *he* doing with such a master? Why are we standing here? The sun overpowers me."

Maitraya led the way toward the room whence the voices emerged; and the Tibetan, seeing they knew where to go, took himself off in the opposite direction. Excepting Dawa Tsering there were no armed men in evidence; the double gate that opened on the alley was barred, but there was no padlock on the bars, and no guard; it looked as if escape, if once determined on, would be simple enough. If the place was a prison its system for detaining prisoners was extremely artfully concealed; there did not appear to be even the sort of passive vigilance employed in monasteries.

Maitraya crossed the cloister, opened a door near the window whence the voices came, kicked it so that it swung inward with a bang against the wall and made an effective stage entry into a dim, enormous room. There was a long row of slippers on the threshold, and he kicked those aside to make room for his own with a leg-gesture that was quite good histrionics. He proposed to be king in his own realm; that was clear enough.

Six men, three women and two boys, who had been sitting with their backs against a wall, stood up to greet him. They were a rather sorry-looking group, dowdy and travel-worn, without an expensive garment or a really clean turban among them; but that was another form of histrionics; there were bundles on the floor containing finery they did not choose to show yet, lest the sight of it might prevent their paymaster, for his own pride's sake, from fitting them out with new, clean clothing.

Maitraya looked disgusted. He knew that ancient method of extortion and assessed it for what it was worth.

"Such a rabble! Such a band of mendicants!" he exclaimed. "I am ashamed to present you to his honor the learned Brahman Gupta Rao, who will play leading parts in our company! He will think it is a company of street sweepers!"

They bowed to Ommony, murmuring "*Pranam,*" and he blessed them perfunctorily, surveying them with one all-comprehending, scornful glance and then turning his back to order Dawa Tsering to close the door. It was more important at the moment to examine the room carefully than to make friends with people who would probably be better kept in a state of groveling, superstitious awe; outcaste actors, who pretend to themselves that they despise a Brahman, actually fear one as they fear the devil if he takes and keeps the upper hand.

The room was about thirty-five feet broad by ninety feet long, extremely high and beamed and cross-beamed with adze-trimmed timbers as heavy as the deck beams of a sailing ship. Apparently provision had been made for prodigious weights on the floor above, and there was a faint suggestion of a smell of grain and gunny bags.

Along one end, to the right of the door, was a platform, not more than four feet high nor eight feet deep, with a door in the wall at the end of it farthest from the courtyard; on the platform was a clean Tibetan prayer mat, not precisely in the center, neither midway between the ends nor midway between the front and rear. The walls were bare, of stone reenforced by heavy timbers, and the only furniture or ornaments consisted of heavy brass chandeliers suspended on brass chains from the ceiling, and brass sconces fastened to the timbers of the walls.

The place was fairly clean except for wasps' nests, and the grease on the floor and walls where the illuminating medium had dripped. There were no prayer wheels, images of gods or anything to suggest a religious atmosphere, which nevertheless prevailed, perhaps because of the austerity. There was a noticeable absence of the smell of incense.

Ommony decided to try the platform; as a Bhat-Brahman he had perfect authority for being impudent, and as a man of ordinary good sense he was justified in taking Dawa Tsering with him, to keep that individual out of mischief; so he beckoned to the dog and Dawa Tsering, climbed to the platform by means of some pegs stuck there for the purpose, and checked an exclamation of surprize.

The trunk full of clothes that he had ordered from Benjamin stood unopened in the far dark corner of the platform, where almost no light penetrated. It was strapped, locked, sealed with a leaden disk, and the key hung from the handle.

He determined there and then to waste no further effort on conjecture. It was self-evident now that the lama knew who he was, and that Benjamin was the informer. Probably on one of the occasions when Benjamin went shuffling along the passage by the staircase in front of his store he had sent a message to the lama; it was possible that, having told his guilty secret, Benjamin turned traitor hoping the lama would find a deadly road to silence. In any case it was ridiculous to waste effort on surmise; events must explain themselves, and luck must favor him or not, as the Powers who measure out the luck should see fit.

He sat down crosslegged in deep shadow on top of the trunk, which creaked under his weight, signed to Dawa Tsering to be seated on the floor, watched Diana curl herself in patient boredom in the shadow beside him, leaned into the corner, listened to the chattering of the actors and to Maitraya's pompous scolding, and presently fell asleep. Not having slept at all the previous night, he had excuse, and opportunity is meant for wise men's seizing.

CHAPTER XIII

SAN-FUN-HO

Lords of evolving night and day!
Ye Spirits of the spaceless dreams!
O Souls of the reflected hills
Embosomed in pellucid streams!
Magicians of the morning haze
Who weave anew the virgin veil
That dews the blush of waking days
With innocence! Ye Rishis, hail!*
I charge that whoso'er may view
This talisman, shall greet the dawn
Degreed, arrayed and ranked anew
As he may wish to have been born!
Prevail desire! A day and night
Prevail ambition! Till they see
They can not set the world aright
By being what they crave to be!
Be time and space, and all save Karma† stilled!
Grant that each secret wish may be fulfilled!

—The Magic Incantation of San-Fun-Ho.

HOW long Ommony slept he did not know, but probably for at least an hour. At first his doze was broken by the sound of the actors' voices, but after a while they may have slept too for lack of better entertainment; the buzz of conversation ceased and he was left to the pursuit of unquiet dreams, in which the lama plotted and disputed with Vasantasena for possession of Samding in a place in which there was a fountain brimful of golden mohurs.

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* The Guardians of the esoteric Law, whose ordinances are regarded as infallible and binding, and from whom the Brahmans are supposed to be descended.

† See footnote to page 117.

He awoke quietly after a while, that being habit, and noticed that Diana's tail was thumping a friendly salute on the platform floor. The next thing he saw was the lama sitting motionless on the prayer mat with Samding as usual beside him. Below them, on the floor of the room, stood Maitraya looking upward. The gabble of angry argument that he caught between sleeping and waking made no clear impression on his brain. The first words he heard distinctly were the lama's, in Urdu:

"My son, you are convinced of a delusion. That is not good. You believe you are answerable for results, whereas you are not even connected with the cause. You have but to obey. It is I who am burdened with the tribulation of deciding how this matter shall be managed, since I conceived it. From you there is required good will and whatever talent you possess for your profession."

The voice was kind, but it did not allay Maitraya's wrath. He scolded back:

"I am famous! I am known wherever we will go. Men will mock me! Am I to be a common mountebank? Vishnu! Vishnu! Why engage me, if you won't listen when I tell you the proper way to do a thing, and what the public will accept and what it will not accept?"

The lama listened patiently, not changing his expression, which was bland and gently whimsical.

"All ways are proper in their proper place. Men will usually take what they receive for nothing," he answered after a pause. "As for *your* dissatisfaction, you may go, my son. You may go to Benjamin, and he shall pay you one week's money."

"I have a contract!" Maitraya retorted, posturing like Ajax defying lightning.

"That is true," said the lama gently. "There would be merit in observing the terms of it."

Maitraya smote his breast, disheveled his turban desperately and turned to throw an appealing gesture to the troupe. But they were a hungry-looking lot, more interested in being fed and paid than in Maitraya's artistic anxieties. The lama looked kind and spoke gently. In silence, with eye-movements, they took the lama's side of the dispute.

"Prostitutes!" exclaimed Maitraya in a frenzy. "You will make apes of yourselves for the sake of two months' wage! Oh, very well. I will out-ape you! I will be a worse ape than the one that ate the fruit out of the Buddha's begging-bowl! Behold me—Maitraya the prostitute! I will be infamous, to fill your miserable bellies!"

Then, facing the lama again with a gesture of heartbroken anguish:

"But this that you ask is impossible! It is not done—never! *My* genius might overcome a difficulty, but how can these fools do what they have never learned?"

"How does the wolf-cub know where to look for milk?" the lama answered, and all laughed except Maitraya, who tried to rearrange his turban.

A woman finished the business for him, grinning in his face as boldly as if there were the slats of a zenana window in between.

"Do you observe that woman?" Dawa Tsering whispered to Ommony. "Now if she were in Spiti there would be knife-work within the day. She lacks awareness of what might be!"

Aware that he, too, lacked that most desirable of assets at the moment, Ommony frowned for silence. There was just a chance that he might pick up a clue to a part of the mystery if he should attract no attention to himself. Maitraya—supposing he knew anything—was in a frame of mind to explode a secret at any moment. He was blowing up again:

"Krishna! By the many eyes of Krishna, I swear to you that some of them can not read!" he shouted, strutting to and fro and pausing to throw both arms upward in a gesture of despair.

"Krishna is a comprehensive Power to swear by," said the lama mildly. "How many can not read?"

Two women confessed to disability; the third boasted her attainment proudly.

"Not so insuperable!" said the lama. "That one woman shall read for the three. Thus the two will learn. Give their parts to them. They have almost nothing to say in the first act."

Samding picked up a dozen wooden cylinders with paper scrolls wrapped around them and bundled the lot into Maitraya's hands.

"We must cast them," said Maitraya. "The cast is all-important. Who shall play which part? It is essential to decide that to begin with."

"No," said the lama; "the essential thing is that every one shall understand the play. Give the women's parts to that woman. Distribute the others at random."

Maitraya with a shrug chose the biggest scroll for himself and distributed the others. Samding beckoned to Dawa Tsering, who got up leisurely as if in doubt whether obedience was not beneath his dignity now that he had changed masters. Samding gave him a scroll, which he carried to Ommony; but neither Samding nor the lama gave a glance in Ommony's direction.

The scroll was written in Urdu in a fine and beautifully even hand, heavily corrected here and there by some one who had used a quill pen. It looked as if Samding might have written and the lama perhaps had revised. There was no title at the head, but the part was marked "The Saddhu,"* and the cues were carefully included. To get light enough to read by, Ommony sat at the edge of the platform with his face toward the lama, and presently began to chuckle. There were lines he liked, loaded with irony.

THERE followed a long silence while Maitraya glanced over his own fat part and consulted stage directions in the margin; it was he who first broke silence:

"O ye critical and all-observing gods!" he exclaimed. "This is modernism, is it! Who will listen to a play that only has one king in it and no queen and no courtiers—but a shoemaker and a goatherd and a seller of sweetmeats and three low-caste women with water jars, and only one soldier—he not a general but a sepoy, if you please!—and a wandering *saddhu* and no vizier to support the king, but a tax gatherer, and a camel driver and a village headman and two farmers—and for heroine—what kind of a heroine is this? A Chinese woman? And what a name! San-fun-ho! Bah! Who will listen to the end of such a play?"

"I will be the first to listen," said the lama dryly. "Let us begin reading."

"And not even a marriage at the end!" Maitraya growled disgustedly. "None marries the king—not even the Chinese woman and her pigtail! No gods—one goddess! Not even a Brahman! How do you like *that*, Gupta Rao? Not as much as one Brahman to give the play dignity!

"What part have you? The *saddhu's?* Let us hope it is a better part than mine.

"Listen to this: I am a king. I enter right, one sepoy following. (O Vishnu! Thy sharp beams burn! A king, and one sepoy for escort!) The sweetmeat seller enters left. Back of the stage the Chinese woman is beside a well under a peepul tree, talking with three women who carry water jars—and may the gods explain how a Chinese woman comes to be there! I address the sweetmeat seller. Listen:

" 'Thou, who sellest evanescent joy—and possibly enduring bellyache—to little ones, what hast thou to offer to me, who am in need of many things?' What do you think of *that* for a speech for a king to make his entry with?"

"To which, what says the sweetmeat seller?" asked the lama. "Who has the sweetmeat seller's part? Read on."

They sat down in a semicircle on the floor, Maitraya standing in the midst of them, and one of the men read matter-of-factly:

" 'Mightiest of kings, thy servant is a poor man, needing money to pay the municipal tax. May all the gods instruct me how to answer! Who am I that I should offer anything to the owner of all these leagues of forest and flowing stream and royal cities? An alms, O image of the sun!' "

"If he were a real king, and this a real play," Maitraya exclaimed, consulting the directions, "he would order that sweetmeat seller into jail for impudence! But what does he do? He looks sad, gives the fellow an alms, and turns to face the women at the well. How can he do that? I tell you, he *must* face the audience. Are they interested in his back? And this is what he says:

" 'Bearers of refreshment! Ye who walk so straight beneath the water jars! Ye who laugh and tell a city's gossip! Ye who bring new men into the world! What have *ye* to offer me, whose heart is heavy? Lo, I bring forth sorrow amid many midwives. Wherewith shall I suckle it'—It is just at this point that the audience begins to walk out!" said Maitraya.

"A woman speaks. What says the woman?" boomed the lama; and the woman who could read held her scroll to the light, speaking sidewise, jerking her head at the lama as if *he* were the king:

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* Holy Man.

"'O maharaja, thy servants are but women, who must toil the day long; and the water jars are heavy! If we bring no man into the world, we are unfortunate; but if we do, we must suckle him and cook and keep a house clean and go to the well thrice daily notwithstanding. Lo, the young one robs us of our strength and increases our labor. We are women. Who are we to offer comfort to a king?'"

"'Enter the *saddhu*,'" read Maitraya. "'He leans on a staff and salutes the king with quiet dignity——'"

"The *saddhu* shall have a dog with him," the lama interrupted. "Samding—" he glanced sidewise at the *chela*—"there is merit in the dog. Consider well what part the dog may play, remembering that he who comprehends the least requires the most attention."

The *chela* nodded, but did not glance in Ommony's direction. He and the lama seemed to take it quite for granted that the dog and her master were obedient members of the troupe.

"Whoever heard of a dog in a play?" Maitraya grumbled. "Krishna! But the very gods will laugh at us! Read, Gupta Rao. What says the *saddhu?*"

"'O king,'" Ommony began, "'thou art truly to be pitied more than all these. Mine—the path that I take—is the only way from misery to happiness. Alone of all these I can give advice. Forswear the pomp and glory of a kingdom——'"

"Pomp—and one sepoy!" Maitraya exploded.

"Silence!" commanded the lama in a voice that astonished everybody; he looked incapable of that stern note of authority; his face was as mild as ever. Ommony continued:

"'—Discard the scepter. Let the reins of despotism fall, and follow me. I mortify the flesh. I eat no more than keeps the body servant to the soul. No house, no revenues are mine, no other goods than this chance-given staff to lean on, and a ragged robe. None robs me; I have no wealth to steal. None troubles me, for who could gain by it? I sleep under the skies or crawl into a cave and share it with the beasts; for they and I, even as thou and I, O king, are brothers.'"

"Now the king speaks," said Maitraya. "Listen to this!—'Brothers? Yes; but some one has to beat the ox. And who shall rule the kingdom, if the ass and the jackal and the pigeon and the kite are reckoned equals with the king? Answer me that, O *saddhu*.'"

"'Rule?'" read Ommony. "'Are the gods not equal to the task? What is this world but a passage to the next—a place wherein to let the storms of karma* pass and store up holiness? Beware, O king!'"

"'The *saddhu* passes on, turns and stands meditating,'" Maitraya read, consulting his scroll. "A shoemaker approaches. What says the shoemaker?"

"He salutes the king," said the lama, "and walks up to the soldier. Now let the shoemaker speak."

A voice piped up from the floor: "'Thou with the long sword, pay me or kill me.'"

"He turns to the king," the lama interrupted. "Read on."

"'O mighty king, O heavenborn companion of the gods! This sepoy owes me for a pair of shoes. Nor will he pay. Nor have I any remedy, since all fear him and none will give evidence against him. I am poor, O prince of valor. May the gods answer if there is any justice in the world! As I am an honest laborer, there is none!'"

"To which the king answers," said Maitraya: "'True. And if you were king what would you do about it?'"

The shoemaker: "'Ah! If I were king!'"

"Now," said the lama, "a crowd collects. They enter left and right, the tax gatherer, the goatherd, the farmers, the camel driver and the village headman. They all make complaints to the king."

"A crowd of seven people!" sneered Maitraya.

"There are dancing women also," said the lama. "They are not wanted to dance until later; therefore they may take part in the crowd in various disguises. They have nothing to say. Read on."

Maitraya read: "'The crowd salutes the king, and the *saddhu* watches scornfully; the *saddhu* speaks. Read on, Gupta Rao."

"'So many men and women, so many fools! Waves crying to an empty boat to guide them! O ye men and women, children of delusion and blind slaves of appetite, how long will ye store up wrath against the hour of reckoning?' "

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*Karma is the Law of Cause and Effect, according to which it is said—by the Eastern sages—that the sins of past lives are atoned for in this one; and in this life the deeds are done which produce inevitable and exactly just consequences in the lives to come.

"Now the shoemaker," said the lama.

" 'Tell us how to collect our debts, thou *saddhu!* Tell us how to feed our young ones! To that we will listen!' "

"Now the tax collector."

" 'Tell me how to get the tax money from men who declare they have nothing! Tell me how to conduct a Government without a revenue! Tell me what will happen if I fail, O mouther of *mantras!**' "

"The king," said the lama, and Maitraya spoke with the scroll behind him to prove how swiftly he could memorize.

" 'Peace, all of you! Ye little know how fortunate ye are to have a king whose only will is that the realm shall ooze contenting justice. Day and night my meditation is to spread contentment through the land. Is this your gratitude? ' "

The *saddhu:* " 'To whom? For what!' "

Ommony's voice charged the line with sarcasm that made the lama glance at him.

"A farmer," said Maitraya.

" 'The locusts spread through the land, and there is no ooze of dew, nor any rain. The crops have failed; and nevertheless, the tax gatherer! He fails not with his visits! Meditate a little on the tax gatherer, O king!' "

The *saddhu:* " 'Aye, meditate!' "

"A camel driver," said Maitraya.

" 'O king, they wait beside the mother camel for the unborn calf. They take from us in taxes at the frontier more than the freight is worth. We fetch and carry, but the profit of the labor goeth to the rich. Our very tents are worn until the women can no longer patch them.' "

The *saddhu*: " 'Live in caves, O brother of the wind!' "

"The shoemaker," said Maitraya.

" 'And the owner of goats charges twice as much as formerly for goatskins!' "

"The goatherd."

" 'Maybe. But he pays me less than half of what is right for herding them! ' "

"The soldier."

" 'Listen, all of you! Behold your king—a great king and a good one! Know ye not the nature of a king? Lo, ye should rally to him and support him! A realm is ruled by force of discipline, wherein is strength; and to the strong all things are possible! Rally to your king and bid him lead you to war on foreigners, who nibble at our wealth like rats and give us no return!' "

"A woman," said the lama.

" 'Tell us first, whose sons shall fight this war!' "

"Another woman."

" 'And who shall console the widows?' "

The *saddhu:* " 'The widows of the conquered nation will console them. *They* will naturally see the justice of the war!' "

"The soldier," said Maitraya. "He shakes his sword at the *saddhu.*"

" 'Peace, idiot! They will invade *us* unless we first attack *them.* Then in which cave will you hide? If I had my way, I would send you in the front rank to the war to show us whether your sanctity isn't really cowardice after all! ' "

"All laugh at the *saddhu,*" said the lama. "Now the king." And Maitraya postured splendidly.

" 'Ye men and women, know ye not that I have neither will nor power to make war unless ye brew the war within you as a snake brews venom in its mouth?' "

The *saddhu:* " 'Yet a snake slays vermin!' "

Maitraya read on: " 'Peace, *saddhu!* There is merit everywhere. Am I not king? And how shall I please all, who so unfairly disagree? Ye see these lines that mark my worried brow; ye see this head that bends beneath the burden of your care; and ye upbraid me with more tribulations? What if I should wreak impatience on you all? Am I alone in travail? Is none among you, man or woman, who can offer me a counsel of perfection?' "

" 'I!' " It was Samding's voice, resonant and splendid yet peculiarly unassertive. It was as if the tone included listeners in its embrace. All eyes turned to Samding instantly, but he sat motionless.

"The crowd divides down the midst," said the lama. "San-fun-ho steps forward from beside the well beneath the peepul tree. She speaks."

" 'O king!' " The *chela's* voice was not unlike a woman's, although its strength suggested it might ripen soon into a royal barytone. " 'I come from a far land where wisdom dwells and all the problems that can vex were worked to a solution in the birth of time. Well said, O king, that there is merit everywhere! Well said, ye men and women, that ye have no words nor wealth to offer to your king. Nor could he understand, nor could he listen, since the ears of kings are deaf to common murmurings, even as *your* ears are deaf to royal overtones. But lo! I bring a talisman—a stone enchanted by the all-wise gods—whose virtue is to change from dawn to dawn the rank, condition, raiment and degree of all who look on it! Avert thine eyes, O king! I would not change *thy* rank, not even while a day and night shall pass. Look, *saddhu*—soldier—goatherd—women—all of you!' "

**Mantra:* A verse from the Vedas; any spoken charm or religious formula.

"She holds up the stone," said the lama, "and they stare at it in superstitious awe. They show astonishment and reverence. Then San-fun-ho intones a *mantra*."

The *chela* began to chant in a voice that filled the huge room with golden sound, as solemn, lonely and as drenched with music as a requiem to a cathedral roof. Without an effort Ommony imagined stained-glass windows and an organ-loft. Maitraya bowed his head, and even the other actors, outcaste and irreverent, held their breath.

It sounded like magic. All India believes implicitly in magic.

The words were Sanskrit and probably only Ommony, Samding and the lama understood them; but the ancient, sacred, unintelligible language only added to the mystery and made the spell more real.

None, not even Maitraya, moved or breathed until the chanting ceased. The lama glanced at Ommony, who was so thrilled by the *chela's* voice as to have forgotten for the moment that he held the *saddhu's* scroll. He looked at it and read aloud in solemn tones:

" 'I did not look! I turned mine eyes away!' "

The king: " 'I looked!' " Maitraya put a world of meaning into that line.

"And that," said the lama, "ends the first act."

"Too short! Much too short!" exclaimed Maitraya.

"Too long," said the lama. "I may have to cut one of your speeches. Now there would be merit in the learning of your parts until the gong sounds for dinner. After dinner we will take the second act. Peace dwell with you. Samding!"

The *chela* helped him to his feet, rolled up the mat and followed him out through the door at the end of the platform, where neither of them paused; some one on the far side of the door opened it as they drew near, pulled back a curtain, admitted them, slammed the door after them and locked it noisily.

FOR a moment after that there was no sound. All stared at one another. Ommony felt half inclined to laugh. He had intended to force an interview with the lama at the end of the rehearsal, but the calm old prelate seemed to have foreseen that move.

"What do you think of it, Gupta Rao?" asked Maitraya.

"Crafty!" answered Ommony, still thinking of the lama. "I mean, full of craft—I mean, it is a good play; it will succeed."

"Perhaps—if he neglects to charge admission!" said Maitraya; but he seemed tempted to share Ommony's opinion. "If he would let me give him the benefit of my experience, it *might* be made into a real play," he added. "And the *chela?* What do you think of the *chela?*"

"I *know!*" said Ommony. "He will make all the rest of us, except the dog, look and sound like wooden dummies!"

"There again!" said Maitraya. "The dog! Before you know it he will order the *chela* to write a part for that knife-swinging savage of yours from Spiti!"

"I wouldn't be surprized. By Vishnu's brow, I wouldn't be surprized at anything!" said Ommony, and cut off further conversation by returning to the trunk and squatting on it with his back to the light to study the scroll of the *saddhu*—or rather, to pretend to study it. He was too full of thoughts of the lama and the *chela*, and of his own good fortune in having stumbled into their company, to study anything else.

"The lama knows I'm Cottswold Ommony. He knows I know who he is. Is he using his own method of showing me what he knows I want to see? Or is he keeping an eye on me while he attends to his own secrets? Or am I trapped? Or being tested?"

He had heard of the extraordinary tests to which lamas put disciples before entrusting them with knowledge.

"But I have never offered to be his disciple!" he reflected.

And then he remembered that lamas always choose their own disciples, and that thought made him chuckle.

"*I* chose Diana and trained her without asking *her* leave," he remembered. "*She* likes it all right. Maybe——"

But the thought of becoming an ascetic Lamaist was too much like burlesque to entertain, and he dismissed it—puzzled more than ever.

CHAPTER XIV

"DID BENJAMIN LIE?"

The ways of the Gods are natural, the ways of men unnatural, and there is nothing supernatural, except this: that if a man does a useless thing, none reproves him; if he does a harmful thing, few restrain him; but if he seeks to imitate the Gods and to encourage others, all those in authority accuse him of corruption. So it is more dangerous to teach truth than to enter a powder magazine with a lighted torch.—From the Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

ALTHOUGH the first act was no more than a prolog, the second was long, constituting almost the entire play, followed by a short third act which was not much more than epilog. For more than half an hour Ommony studied his part in silence, and the more he studied it the more its grim irony appealed to him. The *saddhu* typified intolerant self-righteousness, and the beautifully written lines were jeremiads of abortive sanctity. Whatever else the lama, or whoever wrote the play, might be, he was witty and aware of all the arguments of the accusers of mankind.

It appeared that, having refused to look at the magic jade while the *mantra* was being chanted, the *saddhu* alone went through the second act unchanged. The king, who had looked though warned not to look, became turned for a day and a night into an incredibly wise man—which was just what he wanted to be—but was surrounded by the sweetmeat seller, shoemaker and so on, transformed into members of his court, whose ignorance exasperated him to the verge of insanity.

The soldier had become a general, who prated about patriotic duty. The camel driver was a minister of commerce, who believed that the poor were getting their exact deserts and would be ruined by paternalism. The village headman was a nobleman with vast estates, who rack-rented his tenants and insisted that he did it by divine right. The two farmers had become a minister of finance and his assistant, who conspired to bring about a better state of things by wringing the last realizable rupee from the merchant classes.

The goatherd, strange to say, became a courtier pure and simple, who had no ambition but to make love to every woman who came within his range. The sweetmeat seller was a chancellor whose duty was to invent laws, and the shoemaker was a judge, who had to apply them.

San-fun-ho, it seemed, had also looked into the magic jade, and had become a goddess, with her name unchanged, who came and went, heaping Puck-like irony on every one, king included, and engaging in acid exchanges of wit with the *saddhu*, who had much the worst of it.

The women with the water jars had all become court favorites, who lolled on divans and complained of their tedious, unprofitable fate, inclining rather to the *saddhu's* view of things but unwilling to give up sinecures for austerity — which they declared had gone out of fashion long ago—and cynically skeptical of the morals of the dancing women, who entered early in the second act to entertain the court.

The long and the short of it was that nobody was any happier for being changed, and least of all the king, who had only implored the Powers to make him fabulously wise, and who found his wisdom sterile because foolish people could not understand it.

The second act was supposed to take place at night, after a long day's experience of the results of the sudden change of character; and at the close they all departed to the well to greet the dawn and welcome a return to their former condition.

The third act found them at the wellside, changed again, and San-fun-ho, once more a Chinese woman, took them to task for having failed to see the future seeded in themselves, depending for fruition solely on their own use of each passing moment. Because the *saddhu* had to interject remarks the whole of San-fun-ho's last speech was written on Ommony's scroll, and as he read he chuckled at the *saddhu's* vanquishment. He loved to see cant and pseudo-righteousness exploded. He could imagine the *saddhu*, typifying all he most loathed, slinking off-stage browbeaten, ashamed—and just as bent as ever on attaining heaven by the exercise of tyranny, self-torture and contempt of fun.

Then San-fun-ho's last lines—a *mantra*—

sung to Manjusri, Lord and Teacher, "free from the twofold mental gloom," as redolent and ringing with immortal hope as sunshine through the rain.

He was reading that when the gong sounded—a reverberating, clanging thing of brass whose din drowned thought and drove the wasps in squadrons through the window-slats. And that brought another problem that invited very serious attention. As a Brahman—even a Bhat-Brahman, who is not supposed to be above committing scores of acts the orthodox would reckon unclean—he might not eat in company with actors, nor even in the lama's company, nor in any room in which non-Brahmans were. He began to exercise his wits to find a way out of the difficulty—only to find that the lama had foreseen it and had provided the solution.

Long-robed servants entered from the courtyard bearing bowls of hot food for the actors, but none for Ommony or Dawa Tsering or the dog. Instead, a tall Tibetan came announcing that a meal cooked by a Brahman would be served in a ritually clean room if his honor would condescend to be shown the way to it.

The room turned out to be a small one at the far corner of the cloister, and no more ritually clean than eggs are square; nor had the meal been cooked by a Brahman; but the actors were none the wiser. Dawa Tsering's food was heaped in a bowl on a mat outside the door, and he, having no caste prejudices, squatted down to gorge himself with a wary eye on Diana, Ommony relieved his mind:

"She eats only at night. She won't touch food unless I give permission."

Dawa Tsering promptly tried to tempt the dog, but she turned up her nose at the offer, and the Hillman grinned.

"I think you have more than one devil in you, Gupta Rao! However maybe they are not bad devils!"

He nodded to himself; down in the recesses of his mind there was an evolution going on, that was best left to take its own course.

Ommony left him and the dog outside and shut himself into the small, square room. There was only one door; one window. He was safe from observation. There was a plain but well-cooked meal of rice and vegetables laid out on a low wooden bench with a stool beside it, and a pitcher of milk that smelled as fresh as if it had come from a model dairy; also a mattress in a corner, on which to rest when the meal was finished—good monastic fare and greater ease than is to be had in many an expensive hostelry.

He finished the meal and sprawled on the mattress, confessing to himself that in spite of the lama's having avoided him for twenty years; in spite of the evidence of an astonishingly perfect spy-system that had enabled the lama so infallibly to trace and recover the jade; and even in spite of Benjamin's confession it was next to impossible to believe the old lama was a miscreant. Because of the story of traffic in white children reason argued that the lama was a fiend. Intuition, which ignores deduction, told him otherwise; and memory began to reassert itself.

There was, for instance, some twenty years of correspondence from the lama, mostly in English, with reference to the business of the Tilgaun mission; not one word of it was less than altruistic, practical and sane; there had never been a hint of compromise with even those conventional lapses from stern principle that most institutions find themselves compelled to make. In fact, he admitted to himself that the lama's letters, more than anything else during his life in India, had helped him to see straight and to govern himself uprightly.

And now this play. And Samding. Could a man who made a business of white slavery so educate a *chela* as that one evidently had been educated? Youth takes on the taint of its surroundings. Samding had the calm self-possession of one who knew the inherent barrenness of evil and therefore could not be tempted by it.

And *would* a man, who permitted himself to outrage humanity by dealing in children, write such a play as this one, or approve of it, or stage it at his own expense? The play was not only ingeniously moral, it was radically sound and aimed equally at mockery of wrong ideals and the presentation of a manly view of life. A saint might have written the play, and a reckless "angel" might finance it, but a criminal or a man with personal ambitions, hardly.

Then again there was the mystery of the lama's treatment of himself. How much had Benjamin told? The old Jew had sent the trunk, so there had been plenty of chance to send a message with it. Benjamin might have brought the trunk in person.

Anyhow the lama now unquestionably knew who the Bhat-Brahman was; and he was evidently willing for the present not only to submit to espionage but to protect the spy! And that, unless portending violence or poison later on, was not the attitude a conscious criminal would adopt.

It might be, of course, that the lama had views of his own as to what constitutes crime. He had radical views and was not averse to voicing them before strangers. But if his conception of morality included smuggling children into the unknown Hill country, how was it that he was so careful for the Tilgaun mission and so insistent on safeguards against social contamination?

Above all, why was he so careful to avoid an interview? What did he propose to gain by pretending not to see through the Brahman disguise? True, he had spoken English once or twice, but he had made no comment when the Bhat-Brahman pretended not to understand him.

Was he simply amusing himself? If so, two could play at that game! For the present Ommony had to let the problem go unsolved, but he dismissed the very notion of not solving it, and he determined to get at least as much amusement out of the process as ever the lama should enjoy.

HE HAD about reached that conclusion and was contemplating a siesta when the same attendant who had brought him to the room came to announce that "the holy Lama Tsiang Samdup" was expecting him in the great hall. When he reached the hall, rehearsal of the second act was already under way; Maitraya was getting off a speech he had already memorized, strutting, declaiming, trying to impress the lama and the troupe with his eloquent stage personality.

The lama took no notice as Ommony entered with the dog and Dawa Tsering, but told Maitraya to repeat the lines. Maitraya, rather nettled, gave a different rendering, more pompous, louder and accompanied by gestures more emphatic than the first. The troupe applauded, since Maitraya plainly expected it; but the lama broke into a smile that disturbed his wrinkles as if they had been stirred with a spoon.

"My son," he said quietly, "the whistle does not pull the train."

Maitraya's jaw dropped. He did not seem to know whether to be indignant or to laugh.

"Noise and gesticulation are not without merit in their proper place, when no other means will serve a given purpose," the lama went on. "But if the camel *always* grunts, who will think of lightening the load? Samding, show him how I would like to have those lines read."

Samding spoke from memory, not moving his body at all, and the amazing thing was that one forgot he was a *chela* and almost actually saw a king standing where he was sitting—a king who was bored to distraction and trying to explain kindly to stupid people why their arguments were all wrong. One felt immensely sorry for the king, and saw the hopelessness of his attempt. But all that was between the lines, and in the wonderful inflection of the voice.

"And now, my son, try once more," said the lama. "Imagine the audience is on the stage and speak to them as you would like a king to speak to you; not as you yourself would speak if you were king, but as a king *should* speak to unwise people."

Maitraya swallowed pride, tried again, and so surprized himself with his second effort that he tried a third time without invitation; and the third rendering was almost good. The man had imitative talent and could recognize the right way when he saw it.

The whole of the afternoon was given up to the reading and rereading of the second act. Several times the lama obliged Ommony to repeat his lines without once calling him by name, and once he made Samding repeat them for him, the *chela* doing so from memory, apparently knowing the whole play by heart. The lama was as exacting with Ommony as with Maitraya and the rest. Once he said:

"My son, you *know* the *saddhu* is a false philosopher. You *like* to see him ridiculed by San-fun-ho. And that shows wisdom. There is merit in appreciation. But it is not good to forget that *you* are the *saddhu.* Those who listen must not be aware that you expect to be worsted in argument. Now speak the lines again."

Ommony complied, and did his best, for he was enjoying the game hugely; and that put Maitraya in a somewhat similar frame of mind; Maitraya imitated anything, including mental attitudes, and the rest of the troupe took example from him. When the East sets forth to play a part in earnest, it becomes audience as well as actor, and accepts the drama for reality. Even the lama was pleased. He praised them after a fashion of his own.

"Because you are doing well it would not be good to believe you can not do better. Even the sun and the stars are constantly improving. Let vanity not slay humility, which is the spirit reaching upward."

Then as if that perhaps were too great praise, which might deceive them, he picked out an actor here and there for comforting rebuke:

"You must remember that to play the part of a stupid character requires intelligence. You will grow more intelligent as you endeavor. Now let us begin again at the beginning, trying to forget how stupid we have consented to be hitherto. Let us consent to be intelligent."

He did not once betray impatience or clothe his direction in any of the old religious formulas that, like the proverbs of the West, have become more or less meaningless from too much use. When he needed an example he commanded Samding, and the *chela* spoke at once from memory, occasionally descending to the floor to act as well as speak the lines. Once the *chela* acted the same part in the same way twice in succession, and then *he* came in for reprimand:

"Samding, no two atoms in all nature are alike. No day is twice repeated. No second breath is like the first. Do that a third time. Do it differently."

Tyrant, however, was no right name for the lama. There was no sense of oppression even at the end of a long afternoon when every faculty, Samding's apparently included, ached from exercise. Samding worked harder than them all together, because all through the second act, in the rôle of a goddess, he had to come and go and speak the all-important lines on which the action hinged. But when darkness came and tall, monk-like Tibetans, armed with tapers, lit the hanging lights and set candles in the wall-sconces, the *chela* was as self-possessed and full of life as ever, which he hardly would have been if he had felt imposed on. Dawa Tsering slept all through it, weary from simply looking on.

Ommony, as tired as he had ever been, because his whole mind had been concentrated without remission for hours on end, admitted to himself that he was more than ever puzzled by the lama's character. He liked him—could not help it—did not want to help it.

"The old chap's a genius," he told himself. "He could hardly be a hypocrite and keep the respect of that *chela*, or win mine either. There's an explanation,—— knows what; but there *is* one, for those stolen children. I wonder: Did Benjamin lie about that?"

The lama dismissed the troupe to the far end of the hall, where they sprawled wearily on the floor, awaiting supper. Not moving from the mat, he beckoned Ommony and Dawa Tsering to come and squat on the floor in front of the platform, so that they had to look up to see his face, which is not an easy attitude from which to seize the upper hand.

"Now for the showdown! Good!" thought Ommony, stroking Diana's head as she crouched on the floor beside him. But the lama spoke to Dawa Tsering, using the northern dialect:

"Why did you say to Samding that I owe you two months' pay?" he asked, not offended, curious.

"Oh, I had to say something. I had to have an excuse for seeing you. I had a letter to deliver."

The lama nodded, but his voice became a half-note sterner:

"Why did you use violence to Samding?"

"I am a violent man, and the *chela* offended me."

"What offense did the *chela* commit?"

"Oh, he looked too satisfied. He was a fool to stir the devil in me. Also I was disgusted."

"Why?"

"Because he did not look afraid. And I knew he was afraid—of me! Therefore he was a liar. Therefore I smote him with the letter, and hustled him a time or two. He was afraid to hit back. Let him hit me now, if he is not afraid to."

The lama meditated for a moment—seemed to fall asleep—and then to come out of a dream as if emerging from another universe.

"There is a certain merit in you," he said quietly. "Are you now the servant of this Brahman?"

"I am keeper of the dog. I pick the fleas from her. She is a very wise and unusual devil. She will bite you if *he* says so, not if he says not. And she only eats when he gives her permission."

Dawa Tsering glanced at Ommony, who rather hoped he would say something to the lama about the Bhat disguise and thus bring that subject to a head; but he was disappointed. Nothing was farther from Dawa Tsering's intention; he was thoroughly enjoying what he thought was a perfect imposition on the lama.

"This Gupta Rao," he went on, "is a devil even greater than the dog. I like him. He and I are friends."

"Well," said the lama, "that seems to be excellent, because friends must stand together. There is a devil needed in this play of mine, and you shall act the devil. You will like that. But remember: There must be no offense to Samding or to any one. You and Gupta Rao are together, being, as you say, friends. If I should need to dismiss you because of wrongdoing I will dismiss him also. Therefore his safety—do you hear me?—his *safety* will depend on you, and you must behave accordingly."

The word safety was plainly intended for Ommony's ears, and the *chela* glanced at him; but the lama's eyes did not move. After a slight pause he continued—

"You and the dog will both receive instruction."

Then at last he looked at Ommony.

"Will the dog open her mouth when she is told?" he asked.

Ommony ordered Diana to sit upright; he did not need to use English, it was the tone of voice—the thought behind the sound that she understood. At a sign from him she opened her mouth wide and yawned.

"That is good," said the lama. "That will do. Peace dwell with you, my son—Samding!"

The *chela* helped him to his feet, rolled up the mat and followed him to the door exactly as on the first occasion, leaving Ommony and Dawa Tsering looking at each other until the Hillman threw his shoulders back and laughed.

"*Now* you see why I have served him all these months! I, who have a devil in me! I, who mean to slay a man in Spiti! I, who hate a long-faced monk as an ape hates the river!" Then another thought occurred to him. "You must pay me more money, Gupta Rao, else I will offend the old Bag of Wisdom and he will discharge the two of us!"

But instead of answering Ommony got up and found his way to the little room reserved for him. Through the slats of the window he could hear Dawa Tsering, squatting beside Diana, taking her into confidence:

"It would be amusing, thou, to betray this Ommon*ee* and see what happens. But I am afraid that what would happen might be serious. I think I had better say nothing, because what may happen then will probably be amusing. Thou, I think a person who can teach thee such obedience might be a bad enemy and a good friend!"

Tibetans brought the evening meal, with a huge bowl of rice and a bone for Diana, but Diana refused to touch the food although a man set the bowl down in front of her and Dawa Tsering urged. It was not until Ommony gave her permission that she fell to greedily.

"Thou, Gupta Rao, put no such spell upon me!" Dawa Tsering urged solemnly. "I am used to eating when my belly yearns for it!"

OMMONY finished his meal and decided to find out whether or not he was under any personal restraint. He crossed the courtyard and approached the double gate through which the carriage had entered that morning. There was a Tibetan standing near, who bowed, saw his intention, and opened the gate civilly to let him through.

Diana followed, but he sent her back, making her jump the gate, which she managed at the third attempt, and he could hear the Tibetan on the far side laughing good-humoredly. He knocked on the gate from outside and the Tibetan opened it.

Plainly there was no restriction on his movements; so he whistled Diana and started strolling down the alley, considering Benjamin and wondering whether the old Jew had lied about the smuggled children—and if so, why? What did Benjamin stand to gain by telling such a tale if it were not true?

"The more you know of India the less you know!" he muttered.

It was Diana who transferred his thoughts to another angle of the problem. She had paused at the end of the alley and was signaling in the way she used to in jungle lanes when she detected a human who had no ostensible right to be there.

Ommony stood still, which obliged her

to glance around at him for orders. He signed to her to come to heel and then walked very quietly to the end of the alley, where the corner of a high wall intensified the gathering darkness. No lamps were yet lighted, although there was one fixed on an iron upright at the angle of the masonry above him; it was almost pitch-dark where he sat down, with his back against the wall, giving no orders to Diana, simply watching her.

The hair on the scruff of her neck began to rise; she could hear voices, and so could he presently. A dog on guard, with her master near by, is a totally different animal to one free of control; Diana's subtle dog sense, which would have transferred itself to other interests had she been scouting on her own account, intimated that they were enemy voices, and Ommony had to lay a hand on her to forestall an earthquake growl.

He pulled her closer against the wall, where she crouched obediently, trembling because she added his alertness to her own. She was quite invisible in the depth of the shadow; Ommony was between her and the road into which the alley opened; but he knew that his own figure could be seen, something like a wayside idol, by any one with sharp eyes who should pass close to the corner.

There were two men approaching very slowly, deep in conversation. One wore spurs. Unexplainably—without delving into such science as Chutter Chand expounds in his room behind the jewelry store—Ommony received an impression that they had been pacing to and fro for a considerable time. They came to a halt around the corner within three steps of where he sat, and when he held his breath he could hear their words distinctly:

"You see, Chalmers, if we raid the place without being absolutely sure of our ground, all we'll do is make trouble for ourselves and serve them notice to cover their tracks. We've got to have evidence that'll make conviction certain, or they'll hold us up as another horrid example of official tyranny."

"I tell you, sir, I *know* the women are in here."

"But do you know they are *the* women? But we can't interfere with religion. We'd be in a fine mess if we haled a bevy of legitimate nautch girls into court. We've got to have proof."

"Pardon me, sir. Lamaism doesn't run to nautch girls. These people are Tibetans. They've no proper business in Delhi and absolutely no excuse for lugging unexplainable women around the country. The lama was *seen* to enter Vasantasena's place, and I myself saw him come out and drive off with his *chela* and two other people. I had him followed, and I *know* he drove in here. He hasn't come out since. You know what kind of place Vasantasena keeps."

"Yes, but we also know every member of her household. And she's another individual it's deadly dangerous to monkey with unless we're certain of our facts."

"We've got circumstantial evidence enough to hang a raja, sir."

"Circumstantial won't do, Chalmers. I spoke with McGregor about it today; he assured me there isn't a thing on the lama in the secret archives. He admits there's slavery on the Assam border,* and that slaves are sold into Nepaul and Tibet. But that don't justify us in raiding this place, warrant or no warrant. We'd be inviting a riot.

"The way things are at the moment, Moslems and Hindus 'ud get together and make common cause even with *Christians* if they thought they could jump on us by doing it—and slit one another's throats afterward! They'd call it another Amritsar. I'll tell you what you *may* do if you like—surround this place and shadow every one who leaves it. That way we may get evidence."

There was silence while some one suppressed ill temper. Then a voice—

"Very well, sir."

A piece of mortar from the top of the wall fell to the ground beside Ommony. He glanced up. It was growing very dark, but he thought he saw the shadow of a man's head, vague against the colored gloom of an overhanging tree. The men who were talking moved on, toward the alley mouth—passed it—turned and started back again.

"Hullo!" said one of them, the taller, he with spurs. "Do you notice the audience? Wait! Don't go down there—that's a nasty, —— dark alley—might be an accident.—*Good evening!*" he said, coming to a stand six feet away from Ommony. *"I hope we haven't disturbed your meditations."*

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* See U. S. daily papers 1923; also official Indian Government reports.

Ommony's hand closed on Diana's muzzle. She crowded herself closer against the wall.

"I say, I hope we haven't disturbed your meditations!"

Ommony did not move.

"Maybe he don't know English, sir."

"—— it, I can't see his caste-mark. He looks like a Hindu. Haven't a flashlight, have you?"

The younger of the two men struck a match; its yellow glare showed Ommony in high relief, but darkened the shadow behind him.

"By gad, sir, that's the Brahman who came out of Vasantasena's with the lama!"

The last thing Ommony wanted was police recognition; with the best will in the world the police may bungle any intricate investigation through over-zeal and because they must depend on underqualified subordinates. He was satisfied to learn that McGregor had kept his promise not to unleash the Secret Service on the trail; disturbed to learn that the police on the other hand were busy. During thirty seconds, until the match went out, he cultivated the insolent stare to which Brahmans treat "unclean" intruders.

"Brahman and a lama keeping company? That's strange."

"I'd call it suspicious, if you asked me, sir! What's he doing here? He's not even sitting on a mat. That corner's ritually unclean—fouled by dogs and —— knows what else."

"I'll try him in the vernacular.—I'm curious to know why you are sitting here," said the man with spurs. "Is there anything wrong? Are you ill? Can I help you in any way?"

"Leave me to my meditation!" Ommony answered in a surly tone of voice.

"Why meditate just here, O twice-born? This is a bad place—dangerous—thieves, you know. Don't you think you'd better move on?"

Ommony was in doubt whether or not to answer, but he was afraid Diana might betray her presence unless he could get rid of the inquisitors. He made up an answer on the spur of the moment and growled it indignantly:

"A year ago my son died on this very spot, slain by a bullet from a soldier's rifle. Therefore I choose this place to meditate. I abase myself in dirt before the gods who visited that evil on me."

"—— unlikely story, sir, if you asked me!"

"Everything in this —— country *is* unlikely! Have him watched. You'd better stand at that corner and if he moves off, have one of the men follow him. I'll go back and send you twenty or thirty men to surround the place.—*Good night, O twice-born! Meditate in peace!*"

Ommony listened until their footsteps died away in the near distance. Then, taking very great care that Diana should understand she was still stalking danger, not defying it, he crept on tiptoe to the gate at the other end of the alley and drummed on it with his knuckles.

There was no answer. He tried the gate, but it was fastened on the inside. So he made Diana jump it, and in less than a minute after that Dawa Tsering came and undid the bars.

"Oh thou, Gupta Rao, there are happenings!" he said, showing white teeth that gleamed in the dark.

CHAPTER XV

THE ROLL CALL BY NIGHT

To him who truly seeks the Middle Way, the Middle Way will open. One step forward is enough.—From the Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

WITHIN the courtyard there was not confusion but a silent flitting to and fro as purposeful and devoid of collision as the evening flight of bats. Tall, specter-like figures, on the run, were carrying out loads and arranging them in a long row under the cloister. There was no sign of the lama nor of Maitraya, and only one dim light was burning—a guttering candle set in a sconce under one of the arches.

"They go!" said Dawa Tsering. "They go!" He was excited—thrilled by the atmosphere of mystery. "There was a fellow on the wall, along there at the corner of the garden, where the tree is. He came running; and another summoned the lama; and there was an order given. May devils eat me if they weren't quick! They are like ants when the hill is damaged!"

Ommony approached the cloister where the candle-light threw dancing shadow, and the first thing he recognized was his own trunk, with the bags and bundles of the other actors laid alongside it, in a line with scores of other loads all roped in worn canvas covers. There was every indication of orderly but swift and sudden flight; and only one reasonable deduction possible Dawa Tsering voiced it:

"Women — trouble! Trouble — women! It is the same thing! They bring a man to ruin in the end!"

Ommony sat down on the trunk and suddenly jumped up again. A woman's voice cried out of darkness from an upper story.

"Did you hear that?"

"So screams a woman when the knife goes in!" said Dawa Tsering pleasantly. He was having an entirely satisfying time. "Look to thyself! There is room to hide dead men in this place, and none the wiser!"

But Ommony was not quite sure the woman's cry did not hold a suggestion of laughter.

A Tibetan unlocked the door of the great hall in which the rehearsals had taken place, and Maitraya emerged in a tantrum.

"Krishna! This is too much!" he snorted. "Is that you, Gupta Rao? What do *you* think of it? To lock us in like criminals! To take our luggage—by the Many-Armed Immaculate—what is happening?"

The other actors trailed out after him, the women last, peering over the shoulders of the men in front. One of them was half hysterical and, seeing nothing else to be afraid of, screamed at the dog. Ommony retreated into darkness. Dawa Tsering followed him, immensely free as to the shoulders, like an old-time mercenary fighting man who foresaw trouble of the sort that was his meat and drink.

"Have you a weapon, Gupta Rao? If you asked me, I should say you would need one presently!"

Ommony dragged the Hillman down beside him, and the three—he, Dawa Tsering and the dog—sat with their backs against the wall in impenetrable shadow, out of which they could watch what was passing in the ghostly candlelight.

"How many women has the lama with him?" asked Ommony.

"Oh, lots! I never counted. There are one or two I had my eye on, but the crafty old Ringding looks after them more carefully than an Afghan watches a harem. He and the *chela* are the only ones who can get within talking distance. Never mind. We will have our opportunity now, unless I am much mistaken."

"Why didn't you tell me about these women before?" asked Ommony.

"Oh, I thought you knew everything. Besides, you are probably a gay fellow yourself. I don't like interference. If you and I should love the same one——"

The lama stepped into the wide of candlelight, entirely unexcited, Sanding was with him; the *chela* counted all the loads twice over.

"Wait while I get my yak-hair cloak and the other things," said Dawa Tsering, and disappeared.

The lama said one word, and Samding promptly commenced a roll call from memory in a clear, commanding voice, beginning with a string of northern names, following with Maitraya and all his actors, Ommony's almost last. It was as thrilling as a roll call on a battlefield.

"Gupta Rao?"

"Here."

"Dawa Tsering?"

"Coming!"

"And the dog?"

Ommony whispered to Diana and she bayed once. Everybody laughed, including the lama, who stood so upright that he could have passed for a young man until Samding came and stood beside him, when the contrast exposed the trickery of darkness.

The lama spoke in low tones to a Tibetan, who repeated the order to others, and in a moment all the loads were on men's heads. There was a prodigious number of them; men had arrived like ghosts, apparently from nowhere, and the discipline was perfect.

Not a man spoke. There was no sound except for a grunt now and then and the rutching of heavily loaded bare feet on the paving stones; and not a woman yet in evidence except Maitraya's actresses, who seemed too much frightened to make a fuss, or else too much interested to be frightened; it was hard to tell which.

If there was another order given Ommony did not hear it. The procession started across the courtyard, in through the stable door into which the lama's carriage had vanished when they first drove in that morning; some one opened the door from inside. The lama stood in the courtyard watching, Samding beside him counting, and they two entered last, a dozen paces behind Ommony, Dawa Tsering and the dog; and the moment they entered the echoing arch the door slammed shut at their backs.

It was not quite dark; one candle on an iron bracket showed the shadowy outlines of three carriages on the right, and three horses in stalls beyond that. The place seemed clean, with plenty of fresh air, and the stable smell was not overpowering.

"Have you been here before?" asked Ommony.

"Not I," said Dawa Tsering. "Maybe it is here he keeps the women! This is one of those places the police dare not look into lest men accuse them of committing sacrilege. In my next incarnation I will study to be a priest, because then I can laugh at the police instead of being inconvenienced by them!"

Diana trotted right and left into the shadows, sniffing, interested but not suspicious. It was she, three or four yards ahead, who presently gave warning of danger in the form of steps descending into absolute obscurity. The candlelight did not penetrate to that point, and it was impossible to see whether there was a door to conceal the steps when not in use.

The voices of three women added to Maitraya's complaining of darkness and danger, answered by cavernous rumbling as some one reassured them, proved that the steps did not go very deep, but there was nothing else to judge by until, twenty paces beyond the foot of the steps, the tunnel turned and another solitary candle burning at a corner in the distance showed the long procession shuffling toward it.

There were no rats, no dirt, and it was not particularly damp. The tunnel, which was floored and lined with heavy masonry, was roofed in places by the natural rock, but there were spaces beamed with heavy timber and other spaces filled with what looked like fairly modern concrete. The floor and walls seemed very ancient, but the roof had undoubtedly been repaired more than once within the century. The level could not have been more than thirty or forty feet underground, and there was a distinct draft of cool air passing through.

IT WAS not until he came within a dozen paces of the candle that Ommony's ears, growing accustomed to the echoing shuffle of about two hundred feet, detected that not all that noise came from in front. He looked back, and saw shadowy, black-draped figures behind the lama and Samding. It was impossible to guess how many, since he looked with the light behind him, into darkness, and when he passed the candle the tunnel turned again rather sharply to the right. He stood still at the corner, looking backward, but the lama boomed to him to go on—boomed so cheerfully and confidently that it would have been churlish to refuse.

"Do you suppose those are women behind us?" he asked.

"I know they are," said Dawa Tsering. "For a jest, O Gupta Rao, send thy she-dog to them. There will be a happening!"

There was more in that notion than its propounder guessed. Ommony snapped his fingers for attention, and spoke to Diana as loud as he could without letting the lama hear:

"Friends! Go and make friends!"

He waved his hand toward the rear. Diana turned and darted past the lama, who tried to intercept her; failing, he made a curt exclamation, whose meaning Ommony could not catch.

"What did he say?" he asked.

"It means to be silent because they are not afraid," said Dawa Tsering.

And whoever they were, they were *not* afraid, which was sufficient cause in itself for much hard thinking. Diana was as high at the shoulder as a Great Dane; as shaggy and lean and active as a monster from the folk-lore legends. As an apparition suddenly emerging out of darkness with her eyes aglare in candlelight, she was enough to have thrown old hunters into panic.

But instead there was nothing but laughter, much snapping of fingers and enticing noises made between the lips; and the laughter was as merry and appealing as the sudden view-hallo of children when a circus clown kisses a pig. The lama had to boom a second time for silence, although why he called for silence after that ringing revelation was not exactly clear; surely there was no risk, down there in the tunnel, of the noise being heard by the police. And another thing: His voice was not alarmed, not even anxious or offended; it more resembled that of an engineer who orders steam turned off, or of a clerk convening court—quite matter of fact, with hardly the suggestion of command in it.

Ommony let Diana stay behind there making friends. He chuckled to himself. There were few but him who knew the possibilities of that dog. Having once established in her mind that certain individuals were friends, he would have no particular difficulty in using her to penetrate any screen the lama might contrive. There was no further need to risk an issue with the lama by appearing overcurious; he could wait for opportunity and let Diana open up communications.

Meanwhile it would not have helped him in the least to be inquisitive just then. The tunnel turned again and grew pitch dark—became a stream of echoing noise in which a man could feel his way only by touching the man next to him or elbowing the wall, letting himself flow forward as it were in the general movement, which some forgotten sense reported to the brain.

Then dim light far ahead, and at last a glimpse of sky, framing half a dozen stars, that made the tunnel seem even darker and a backward glimpse impossible. Diana came sniffing for Ommony and shoved her nose into his hand, as if to reassure him that the people at the rear really were friends. Then she suddenly bayed at the sight of the sky in front and raced away to investigate.

Ommony did his best to memorize the details of the tunnel opening, but failed. There were steps, but not many of them. Then he found himself in a courtyard about thirty yards square, with stars overhead and the shadowy, columned entrance of a place that looked in the dark like a temple behind him. He was aware that a stone floor had come sliding forward to conceal the flight of steps; a man had shouted to him to hurry lest he be caught in the gap, and he had seen that the sliding stone was two feet thick. There was no sign of the lama, or of Samding, or the women.

There were camels in the courtyard; he knew that by the smell before he saw them kneeling in two uneven rows. Diana, who hated camels, came to heel, growling to herself in undertones, and Dawa Tsering laughed aloud.

"I smell travel and the road that runs north!" he said triumphantly. "The —— may have these hot plains! Wait while I pick us two good camels—wait here!"

He disappeared, and within the minute there were sounds of hot dispute—three voices. A camel rose like an apparition from another world and snarled as if this world were not satisfying. A heavy thump—a louder oath—and Dawa Tsering limped back.

"In the belly! Kicked me in the belly!" he gasped, unable to stand upright but with enough wind left in him for agonied speech. "I would have hamstrung the brute—those Tibetan—ehh, but it hurts!—they pushed me toward his hoof again and—yow! Let me sit so—stand beside me—yah-h, I have a bellyache!"

The courtyard was alive with movement, but there was hardly a spoken word. The camels moaned and gurgled, as they always do when loads are being heaped on them, and now and then some one called out for an extra package to balance an animal's burden; but on the whole there was even less noise than when Bedouins strike tents and vanish. After a while as his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom Ommony could make out men who certainly were not Tibetans; they wore turbans and were more like Bikaniri camel men. Then, huge and shadowy against the sky, there loomed seven elephants with curtained howdahs, making no noise, effortless, coming through an open gate like fantoms in a dream.

Next there came from behind Ommony a man in a turban and long cloak, followed by a younger man whose stride seemed familiar, who wore the dress of a chieftain and a simitar at his waist. Diana knew them instantly and wagged her tail. They were the lama and Samding, changed almost out of recognition. Ommony followed them, wondering at the lama's strength of gait that he seemed to have acquired along with the change of costume; they were presently surrounded by Tibetans, who seemed to be receiving whispered instructions. Unable to get close enough to hear what was being said, Ommony turned his attention to the elephants and noticed that they bore the trappings of a raja, although he did not know which raja. He asked one of the mahouts, who told him gruffly to mind his own business.

He walked up close to one of the camel men, but it was too dark just there under the wall to see his features.

"Whose man are you?" he asked.

"Mine own man!" the fellow answered in a plucked, flat harp-string of voice. "Have a care! This camel bites!"

Ommony jumped in the nick of time to avoid the vicious teeth. Diana flew at the camel; the heavily loaded brute struggled to its feet, tried to kick four ways at once, and bolted. Ommony grabbed Diana. Nine or ten men chased the camel into a corner, managed it amazingly with forked sticks and compelled it to kneel. It was plainly enough a desert outfit, used to meeting all emergencies without fuss.

Then the shadowy elephants moved in single file across the yard and halted, swaying, at a door beside the one that Ommony had come through; he could see the top of a ladder laid against the first one from the far side but could not see who mounted it. A moment later, however, he caught sight of the lama and Samding, the lama walking like a warrior, skirted, pantalooned, seeming to have thrown off thirty years; they climbed on to the last of the elephants and moved off first, the others following.

After that there was confusion for about a minute; several more elephants came through the gate, colliding with the loaded ones, and for reasons that were doubtless logical to them the camels all got up at once and stampeded into the jam. But a little, low-muttered swearing, some sharp cries and a lot of stick-work straightened that out. The camels were herded out into the open behind the elephants; the second lot of elephants came in, and a Tibetan seized Ommony's arm.

Not a word. No explanation. Two other men seized Dawa Tsering, taking no chances with him, pouncing on him from behind and shoving him along toward the same elephant to which the first man led Ommony.

Maitraya's voice was raised in protest somewhere in the dark, and a woman cried out hysterically; but none answered either of them. The whole party of actors was hauled into curtained howdahs like so much baggage. Diana jumped—Ommony caught her by the scruff of the neck, hauled her in after him, and found himself in a howdah with Dawa Tsering and one Tibetan, who leaned forward, touched Dawa Tsering on the shoulder and shook a finger at him meaningly. For answer the Hillman made a gesture toward his knife.

But they were off, swaying like insects on an earthquake, before that argument could ripen into happenings, and in less than two minutes the Hillman was seasick, hanging on and moaning that he could smell death.

"That camel kicked my belly into ruins! Peace! I will get down! I have had enough of this!"

But the Tibetan leaned forward and lashed him very neatly to the howdah with a rope.

"Cut me loose, Gupta Rao—or I call thee Ommon*ee!*"

"Nay," lied Ommony, "it was my order."

"Thou? Oh, very well! Ommon*ee!*" he yelled. Then again between spasms of vomiting: "Ommon*ee!* Ommon*ee!*"

It did not seem to matter. The Tibetan took no notice of it. Such a cry by night, smothered by howdah curtains, was not likely to mean much to chance passers-by. Perhaps Maitraya could hear it on the elephant ahead, but he would not know what it meant.

Ommony let his name be yelled until the Hillman wore himself out, hoping that the Tibetan would be too much disturbed by it to notice anything else. He had his finger through a small hole in the curtain and was tearing it for a better view.

He did contrive to snatch one hurried glimpse before the Tibetan saw what he was doing; but it was dark, there was no moon, and all he saw was a broken wall with trees beside it—nothing that would help identify the route.

The Tibetan touched him on the arm and shook a warning finger, then climbed over to Ommony's side of the howdah and tied up the hole carefully with thread torn from a piece of sacking. He did not seem in the least afraid of the dog, nor did she object to him. On the principle that good dogs know what their masters think subconsciously about a stranger, Ommony decided that the Tibetan was quite friendly.

And the process of self-adjustment to mysterious conditions consists rather in keeping adventitious friends than in losing them. It seemed much more important to disarm suspicion and to create a friendly atmosphere than to find out which direction they were taking. He was likely to discover nothing if he should make himself objectionable; judging by the treatment Dawa Tsering had received, there was likely to be very little patience shown with disobedience. The Tibetan looked big and strong enough to whip three men single-handed.

As a matter of fact, Ommony did not much care where he was going. He guessed he was on the "Middle Way"; and that, if true, was the all-important fact. Details of the route, he knew, might change from hour to hour; the key to it was probably a string of individuals extended all across the country, bound together by a secret interest in common. He decided not to try to memorize the route, but to look out for and identify those men.

However, he made one casual attempt to draw the Tibetan, in the hope of further disarming suspicion by appearing naturally, frankly curious.

"Where are we going?" he asked in Prakrit.

"Wherever the holy Lama Tsiang Samdup wishes," the man answered, almost to himself, as if he were repeating prayers.

After which there was long, swaying, hot silence, broken only by the groans of Dawa Tsering and the soft, exactly regular footfalls of the elephant.

CHAPTER XVI

"WHERE ARE WE?"

Treason, as between men, is considered worse than theft; for even thieves despise it. He who betrays his country is considered fit for death. But I tell you: he who betrays his own Soul has no longer any link with honesty, and there is nothing sure concerning him, except that he will go from bad to worse. And evil grows little by little; he who is faithless in small things will ultimately lose all honor. Therefore, strive eternally to keep faith, not telling secrets nor enquiring uninvited into those of others, for the Great Offense is grounded on an infinite variety of little ones—exactly as Great Merit is the total of innumerable acts of self-control.—From the Book of Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

EACH to his own heaven. Some men prefer golf. To Ommony the seventh heaven of delight—the apex of a heterodox career—was reached that hour in a curtained howdah, lurching into unknown night. And the best of it was that he knew the future must hold even more thrilling mysteries. There was going to be no anti-climax.

He was uncomfortable, sweating so that his dripping cotton garments clung to him, breathing the smell of elephant and dog and Dawa Tsering—which is no boudoir mixture—possibly in deadly danger. And he was utterly contented, having no regret, no backward yearning.

The curtains that cut off the view could not limit imagination. He enjoyed a mental picture of the string of camels leading and the elephants mysteriously padding in the wake, beneath colored stars and a blue-black sky, between broken walls and shadowy trees, toward an obscure horizon. The dusty footfalls were as music. The mahout's occasional expletives were an "Open Sesame" to mystery beyond the reach of ordinary men—and that perhaps explained nine-tenths of the delight.

It is doing what the other fellows can not do that satisfies; and so, through vanity, the gods make use of us. No millions nor fame nor offers of a sterilized and safety-infested heaven could have tempted Ommony to forego that journey in the howdah, although there were not wanting opportunities to steal away.

Now and then there were halts, when muffled voices of unseen men on foot, who turned up out of the night, delivered terse commands that were barely audible and quite incomprehensible through the howdah curtains. Time and again he could have tumbled out of the howdah and lowered himself to the earth by the elephant's tail; once or twice he thought of doing that and following, with the help of Diana when the pace should make it impossible to keep the caravan in sight. But he preferred to act Jonah in a whale's belly, especially since the whale was willing.

He knew that with the dog's help he could have tracked the caravan to its destination and so have learned the details of the course it took. But he also guessed that none who saw it pass would answer questions; and at the other end there was the risk that he might find a blank wall, silence, and perhaps a knife's edge for inquisitive intruders. The problem of perpetual motion is not more baffling than India's secretiveness toward those who try to view her secrets from outside. He elected to stay inside—was in fact delighted to stay inside, although aware that he would have no chance whatever to protect himself if the lama should decide to get rid of him.

He trusted the lama intuitively, yet kept trying to convince himself he should mistrust him. Perhaps, he decided, the lama was one of those not rare men who are saints with one part of their nature and with the other part unconscionable devils;

there have been kings, reformers, conquerors aplenty marked with that peculiarity. Wisdom—for a man may summon wisdom even in a howdah, behind curtains, in the night—suggested that the best course was to accommodate the lama's saintlier side, which was easy enough to discern if difficult at times to understand; and as for the other side of him, to ignore it as long as possible.

To play for safety—to look for it, to expect it—would be ridiculous. He must run all risks without a gesture of self-protection. He was glad he had not even a revolver with him, for a hidden weapon might betray him into rashness of the wrong kind. He made up his mind, if he were threatened, to rely solely on whatever wits the gods of emergency might sharpen for him at the moment.

Meanwhile he felt reasonably sure of one thing: That the elephants were a raja's property. The camels might possibly belong to some one else, but it was more likely they were also the same raja's. There might be a raja who would not ask questions, but who was linked in some chain of more or less esoteric brotherhood, akin perhaps to Masonry.

If so, the procession would arouse no comment on the countryside, for it is no man's business and to no man's profit to inquire too closely into a raja's private doings; he who does so may count with almost absolute precision on what the jury will subsequently call an accident. "I don't know, I didn't see" and "I forget" are difficult, exasperating pegs on which to hang a chain of evidence.

AT THE end of two hours' swaying Dawa Tsering's stomach, void of embarrassing content, began to recover. His sunny disposition followed suit.

"Loose me, Gupto Rao. I am sorry I bawled out thine other name. I will slay this fool who heard me. Then none will be the wiser, and thou and I friends again."

"Do you hope ever to see Spiti?" Ommony inquired.

"By the wind that blows there, and the women who laugh there, surely! I have a treasure tucked away in Spiti—earned on the te-rains. Loose me, Gupta Rao, or I call thee by thine other name again! I can shout louder, now my belly aches less."

"Shout, and let us see what happens," Ommony suggested.

The small boy's mind that had its kingdom in the Hillman's bulk considered that a moment.

"Nay," he said presently, "I think that an evil might happen. The luck is not good lately. Who would have thought a camel would kick me? The devils who live in the hills around Spiti woe me for many a good turn I did them. The devils of these parts seem very mischevious. I had better behave myself."

"How about a promise?" Ommony suggested.

"You mean, a promise between me and you? But I would have to keep it. That might be inconvenient."

"I would promise for my part to assist you to return to Spiti at the proper time."

"Oh, very well. Only I shall judge the proper time by when the devils have turned friendly. Loose me. I will behave myself."

Ommony undid the rope; and the Tibetan, far from objecting, stuck a stump of candle on the bare wood of the howdah frame, lighted it, produced a pack of cards and challenged Dawa Tsering to a game. They played interminably, both men cheating, both appealing to Ommony to settle constant arguments, although there was no money involved

"My honor is at stake," Dawa Tsering grumbled after about a dozen furious disputes. "This ignorant Tibetan says I am a liar."

"So you are," said Ommony.

"That may be. But he has no right to give himself airs. He is the greater one. Look! He has five cards tucked under his knee, whereas I had but two!"

He shoved the Tibetan so that his knee moved and uncovered the missing cards, two of which slipped down between the howdah and the elephant's flank, thus putting an end to the game.

"But I have dice!" said Dawa Tsering; and from then until dawn they murdered time and peace with those things, while Diana, her tongue hanging out with the heat, panted and shifted restlessly. Ommony snatched scraps of sleep, dimly aware that Dawa Tsering was losing more often than he won, growing more and more indignant with devils who refused to bring him luck, although he spat on the dice and abjured many devils by name.

"I will obey thee, Gupta Rao, until the luck changes," he said at last. "My dice are loaded, yet even so I can not win! Luck is funny stuff."

It was about ten minutes after dawn, the choicest hour in India, alive with cock-crow and the color-drenched solemnity of waking day, when the tired elephant came to a final halt in some sort of an enclosure and shuffled a slow measure to call the mahout's attention to sore feet. At a sharp word of command the beast lay down, like a hillside falling. Diana sprang out through the curtains and Ommony followed, yawning and sitting down on the elephant's forefoot to pretend to watch the mahout's ingenious ministrations to a corn, while he surveyed the scene from under lowered eyelids.

The other elephants, already offloaded, had shuffled away to a roofed enclosure at the far end of a compound, where great heaps of food awaited them and equally huge vats of water. The camels, still burdened, were lying down in picturesque confusion, carrying on a camel conversation, which consists in snarling at the world in general. Along one side of the compound was a row of mules, tied by the heel with their rumps toward the wall, squealing for breakfast, which was being brought by naked boys and by a *bhisti*, who poured water into buckets from a goatskin bag.

The opposite side of the compound was formed by a low, two-storied building with a double-decked veranda supported on square wooden posts running the entire length. There were flies, much litter, and a most amazing smell.

Over the roof of the building, where a long line of crows formed a mischievously interested audience, there appeared a jumble of other roofs that made no pretense to architecture. One wall of the compound appeared to face open country, but the other two formed the flanks of nondescript, flat-roofed dwellings, beyond which trees and more roofs appeared. Small-town noises, such as a smithy bellows and the hammer-ring on iron, the patter of goats' feet and the heavier tread of cattle being driven forth to graze, arose on all sides. There was one minaret in sight, and one Hindu temple-roof ornate with carvings of deific passion. The compound gate was locked, and there was a guard of two men standing by, not evidently armed, but obviously sullen and alert. There was no sign of the lama, nor of any women.

After a minute or two Maitraya looked out from a door midway under the long balcony and greeted Ommony with the familiarity of boon companionship established by journeying together. It needs only one night of shared discomfort on the road to produce that feeling, or else its opposite. One either hates or likes one's fellow traveler; there is no middle ground on the dawn of the second day out.

"Do you know where we are?" Maitraya asked cheerfully.

Ommony did not know, but he was no such fool as to admit it; and to have asked such a simple question before that crowd of mahouts, camelmen, *saises*, *bhistis* and baggagemen would have been beneath a Bhat's dignity. In his capacity of wiseacre he gave the mahout good advice regarding elephants' corns, about which he knew nothing; in his rôle of privileged extortioner he demanded arrack from a man who seemed to be the master of the stables, and established friendship with the elephant by giving the grateful beast two-thirds of a bottleful of the atrocious stuff. In his guise of actor of uncommon parts he swaggered, stretching his legs toward Maitraya and demanded to know where breakfast might be. But Maitraya did not know that either.

Meanwhile Diana was exploring on her own account, alarming many mules, offending camels and reducing elephants to a state of old-maidish nervousness, at which their mahouts yelled in chorus, offering to throw sticks, dung and missiles of all sorts, but daring no more than the threat. Diana, solemnly indifferent to abuse, and contemptuous of elephants since she had ridden on the back of one, snooted around in corners until she reached the end door under the balcony; and, finding that open, she entered. There was an instant chorus of women's voices. Maitraya grinned.

"Gupta Rao," he said, "I have seen many curiosities in my day, but those dancing girls surpass all! They are not Hindus, that I swear. They are not Moslems. And they wear no veils. If they are Tibetans, Krishna! I will risk my life and go to Tibet!

"You should have seen them, Gupta Rao! *I* saw them descend from the elephants; and Vishnu! Vishnu! I assure you my heart thumps! Such beauty! Such chastity redeemed by mirth! Such modesty of manner uncontaminated by humility! If any one should tell me they are goddesses I would believe him!

"I foresee adventures, Gupta Rao! That divinity of yours who broke your pocketbook in Bikanir will have a dozen strong competitors! Krishna! I am impassioned! I am inflamed with love! If I can find a shrine of Hanuman I will make gifts and a sacrifice this morning "

Diana emerged, led out through the door by Samding, who held her collar; seeing Ommony, the *chela* signaled to him with a smile to call the dog.

"I hate that *chela!*" said Maitraya, grinning. "Did I not tell you I had an intuition to be jealous of him! Is it possible those twice-born creatures are the *chela's* wives?"

"Whom are you calling twice-born?" Ommony demanded, instantly assertive of a Brahman's rights.

"*Pranam!*" said Maitraya. "But wait until you have seen them!"

Impelled by a feeling that perhaps the luck might favor him, and partly in order to live up to his Bhat reputation, Ommony strolled toward the door whence Samding and the laughter had emerged. It was slightly ajar.

But he had hardly reached it when the Tibetan who had been fellow traveler during the night touched him on the shoulder, led him back to a door at the extreme opposite end and almost violently shoved him into a room furnished with a clean wooden table and a bench. Food was on the table—loads of it—fruit, milk, chupatties, honey, butter, boiled rice, and flowers enough to have graced a wedding feast. The Tibetan slammed the door, and Ommony heard him turn a key on the outside.

However, there were two doors to the room, and the window was not fastened. He went first to the window and made sure that Diana was within hail; she was watching Dawa Tsering gorge his breakfast from a bowl in the shade of the compound wall not fifteen feet away. Having satisfied himself on that score, he discovered that the inner door was not locked, so he attacked the food, that being an important consideration when you don't know what the next five minutes may bring forth. The locked outer door and the guard on the compound gate were not exactly reassuring.

The lama came in through the inner door just as Ommony finished eating. He was alone, no longer dressed in the warrior-like garb of the night before, and looking old again—immensely old, because the morning light streamed through the slats of the window and showed all his wrinkles. The snuff-brown color of his robe was streaked with old-gold by the sunlight. In that moment one could believe he was a rather world-weary, very wise old saint; it was next to impossible not to believe it.

Yet there was humor in his eyes and a gaze unconquerable—blue-gray—very wide awake. His frame for the moment seemed shrunken; yet his height, though he stooped from shoulders that seemed almost too weary to support his head, was considerably more than Ommony's. Something more than stature, something indefinable about him, made him look great—made Ommony feel small.

"Peace perfect you in all her ways!"

The blessing was solemn; but the voice rang like a young man's with assurance, as if he knew that his will to bless was infinitely overpowering.

"And to you, my father, peace," said Ommony, aware that his voice sounded flat and empty.

He had stood up when the lama entered. He felt rather like a small boy in the presence of a humorously stern headmaster.

"And the food was enough? And good enough?" the lama asked. "The journey not distressing?"

"Where are we?" Ommony retorted bluntly.

It was his first chance to talk with the lama alone; he proposed to make the most of it. But the lama merely smiled until his wrinkles were all in movement, and the fearless old eyes shone with kindly humor:

"My son, he who knows *where* he is knows more than all the gods. He who knows *what* he is knows all things. Is it not enough that each moment we are where we should be? Is not the whole universe a mystery? How shall the part be more comprehensible than the whole, since it must partake of the quality of the whole?"

But Ommony did not propose to be put off by wise conundrums. His jaw came forward obstinately.

"I was locked in here," he said. "I have a right to know why."

"To keep out those whose ignorance might cause them to intrude," the lama answered, exactly as if he were in the path of the inquisitive."

Feeling as if stilts had been kicked from under him, Ommony tried again, more bluntly:

"You *know* who I am," he began, speaking in English; but the lama interrupted in Urdu:

"My son, if I knew that I should be wiser than all Those whose duty is to rule the stars! You have answered to the name of Gupta Rao."

"For ——'s sake," said Ommony, again in English, "why not tell me outright what your business is? I'll *begin* by being frank. I'm spying on you! I would like to know you are above suspicion, but at present I'm in doubt."

"My son," said the lama, answering in Urdu, "no man is above suspicion. The sun and the moon cast their shadows, and therein the destroyers lurk. Doubt is the forerunner of decision. Shadows move. All revelation comes to him who waits."

That sounded like a promise. Ommony jumped at it.

"We have one interest in common—Tilgaun. Why treat me as an enemy? Why not clear the air now by telling me the truth about what all this mystery means?"

"My son," said the lama in Urdu again, "no man can ever be told the truth, which either is in him, or it is not in him. If it is, he will *see* the truth. If it is not, he will see delusion and will confuse himself with surmise. He who looks for negation beholds it. He who looks for truth beholds negation also, but perceives the truth beyond. Wherein have I shown you enmity?"

For a moment there was silence. Ommony tried to think of another way of getting past the lama's guard, but the old man's impersonal dignity was like armor. Short of sheer impudence there seemed no way of penetrating it; and it is not easy to be impudent toward commanding old-age when you have schooled yourself in courteous respect for others' feelings all your life. Ommony's own character was in the scale against him; at the moment he almost wished himself a cad.

"There are things you may see, but you must put your own interpretation on them," said the lama. "One by one we attain to understanding. The wise ponder in silence, but the fools are noisy, and the noise precedes them to their doom."

That sounded like a threat; but the lama's face was as kindly as ever, rippled again with quivering wrinkles as a smile broke and vanished into the recesses of brown-ivory skin.

"Come!" he said; but instead of opening the door behind him he strode first to the window, threw the shutters back, glanced out and made a clucking noise.

Diana jumped in, and Ommony wondered; she was trained to be wary of strangers, and was not given to obeying even her master's friends unless carefully charged with that duty by Ommony himself. She thrust her nose into the lama's hand before she came and fussed over Ommony.

The lama led the way into a narrow passage on to which many doors opened right and left; it extended from end to end of the long building, its walls forming a double support for the heavy beams of the floor above. Two-thirds of the way along it he opened a door on the right, and a chorus of women's voices burst through the opening. But there were no women to be seen yet, because the door opened on to a gallery; there was an extra, lower floor on that side of the building, and the gallery ran around two sides of a large room, screened from it by a breast-high balustrade. The lama led the way to the farther end, where the gallery was twenty feet wide and Samding waited, standing beside a spread Tibetan prayer mat, marvelously dressed in ivory white and looking like a young god. However, god or no god, he had to alter the position of the mat by an inch or two before the lama would sit down, after which he motioned to Ommony to be seated on the floor in the farther corner, where he could see through a slit in the wooden panel and look down on the floor below.

TO BE CONTINUED

BEST BUGLER *in the* WORLD

by BARRY SCOBEE

Author of "'Red Pig' of the North," "Bandit's Glory," etc.

OLD Chief Trumpeter Cart of the Artillery and his ancient friend, Chief Musician Gray of the Infantry, met quite by chance at dusk just outside the gate of the big garrison.

"Ho!" sang out Cart. "I was just wishin' to meself that I could set eyes on ye. Come along an' we'll have a wee bit of a nip, as O'Grady would say."

"No." Gray shook his head. "I'm up the pole this week."

"What!" bawled the artilleryman. "Are ye tryin' to wreck old friendship? Trying to shun my society? Have ye forgot our promise?"

"No, I haven't forgot it!" protested Gray in sudden heat. "Sure not. Whichever one of us cashes in first——"

"—the other blows Taps——"

"—over his grave."

They clasped hands gravely.

"Ah, ye ain't forgot," conceded Cart, "and for that I'll do me best by ye. You'll be an inspirashun to me and me bugle, a layin' there so quiet and noble. And now will ye come with me and get togged up?"

"One, Cart. I'll take one with you for old days' sake, but I won't get togged up."

"Well, stay dry then, ye old chip, but I'm going to get soused to the scuppers. I'm going to get old Malley tonight."

Old Malley was the colonel of the infantry regiment. The year that he had come from West Point, a stiff-backed shave-tail, Cart had been a raw recruit, and somehow, Gray nor any one else knew how, the young officer had given mortal offense to the young soldier. Possibly even Cart did not remember what it was, for he never mentioned the matter except on his sprees, at which times he had been threatening for years to thrash the old officer.

"Goin' to get revenge," he repeated.

"Don't be a fool," admonished Gray. "Lay hands on him and your honorable record won't be honorable no longer. They'll bob-tail you, and won't 'dishonorable discharge' look fine for an old soldier like you!"

"Are you coming for a drink, Gray, or are you standing there till tattoo a preaching?"

"I'll take one, Cart. One, mind you, but I won't get togged."

Arm in arm the old cronies went to the nearest drinking place, and there with elevated glasses they drank toasts to each other courteously.

"To the best bugler in the world," said Cart.

"To the best bugler in the world," said Gray likewise.

There were no prouder fighting men in any man's army than Cart and Gray—proud of the uniform, of their good conduct records, proud of the Army and its traditions, proud of their long friendship, and proud of their capacity to stand up under adverse conditions. But this last ability was sadly diminished, and three hours later both men were careful to hold on to the bar with at least one hand all the time to steady themselves.

"Here's to the bes'—buglerintheworl'," toasted old Gray, elevating his glass.

"Who's bes' bugler?" demanded Cart suspiciously. "You 'r' me?"

"Wouldn't like to say, chief. But you answer me thish: How'd a bob-tail soldier salute a cashiered officer on a condemned mule in an abandoned army post?"

"That ol' ches'nut? When you drag that ou', you're drunk."

"Ans' me!"

Chief Trumpeter Cart, who sat his horse with such dignity at regimental parade, raised thumb to nose and solemnly wiggled his fingers.

"Yes," agreed Gray, "thass the way he'd salute."

"Now you answer me this," demanded Cart, "and no 'vasion. Who's best bugler in the world?"

"Well," began Chief Gray argumentatively, "I belong to the best Army in the world, don't I?"

"Sure. So do I. Same Army."

"An' I belong to the best division in the best Army, don't I?"

"Sure. So do I. Same division."

"And I belong to the best brigade in the best division, don't I?"

"Sure. So do I. Same brigade."

"And I belong to the best regiment in the best brigade, don't I?"

"No—siree—you—don't! Different regiments. I belong to the best regiment. Artillery regiment. You're just *infantry*."

Gray ignored the scorn in this. He summed up:

"I belong to the best regiment in the best brigade in the best division in the best Army in the world. And ain't I the chief trumpeter in my regiment? Hey? Answer that, Chief Cart, and be done with argument."

Old Cart turned on his inquisitor with red-faced wrath, breathing through his nose in snorts like a horse.

"Yes," he derided hoarsely, "you're the best bugler in the world!"

"Thanks," murmured Gray, pleased as Punch. "Merit will out. What'll ye have to drink, Chief?" He rapped on the bar for service. "You can order anything your taster fancies."

But now Cart exploded. He raised his great arms mightily as if to beat Gray down into the sawdust of the floor, and he bellowed so that he could be heard a block away.

"Yes! Yes! You're the best bugler in the world—after I'm gone!"

They glared at each other ferociously. Other soldiers about the place tittered. Then the bartender interfered in his thin cold voice:

"Here, you old roosters, you been chawing that rag for seven years to my personal knowledge. Can't neither one of you bugle for sour apples. When you going to give us a little rest, hey?"

The two old regimentalists did not unbend to answer this fresh young upstart, but hooking elbows they swayed out together—a couplet on friendship. Outside they struck off toward the garrison gate.

"Fine night for drunks," observed Gray, the cool air clearing his thought. "No mud and plenty o' moonlight."

"I'm goin' to get old Malley," proclaimed Cart. "I am, I am!"

Gray was startled, for there was suddenly the resonance of a wild purpose in the artilleryman's voice. And Gray remembered now that all evening Cart's laughter had been like a premonition of evil.

"Goin' to get old Malley—I am, I am, I am!"

"Here—here," cautioned Gray savagely. "None o' that stuff in high-G or the guard'll get us in short order."

"Goin' to get old Malley, I tell ye. I am, I am——"

Gray shook his comrade violently, and Cart, surprized and sobered slightly, went along quietly, though sullenly. But within the gate, where their ways parted, Cart became maudlin.

"Say, y'ain't mad at me, Chief? Y'ain't mad at old Cart? Y'ain't forgettin' our promise?"

"Sure not, Chief. Couldn't forget our promise."

"First goes—" suggested Cart.

"—t'other blows," finished Gray.

They shook hands on it for the thousandth time and parted, Cart muttering about old Malley. Valiant soldiers, old men before their time from liquor, idleness and war.

WITH the habit of over twenty-five years of Army service upon him, Chief Musician Gray awoke the next morning at the initial note of first-call, and in a pair of minutes was dressed, even to his wrapped leggings, and was approaching the guard-house to sound reveille with the other buglers.

"Hi, dad," called out the musician of the guard, who had been on duty all night at the guard-house and was in a position to know, "your side-kick sure got himself into a mess last night."

"Eh?" Gray was startled.

"Yeah, old 'Cart-before-the-horse' got himself slung into the mill."

"What? What for?"

"He beat up the colonel—old Malley."

"No," pleaded Gray, going white and groping into thin air with his hands in vain search for support. "No, boy, don't joke that way."

"Ask the sergeant."

All eyes turned on the sergeant of the guard for confirmation.

"S'right," he vouched. "The old soak found the colonel's bed on the sleeping-porch and tried to choke him, and wallopped him with a chair."

"My ——," groaned Gray. "They'll give him a bob-tail."

"Sure. Won't 'dishonorable discharge' sound fine for an old-timer like him! But they won't bob 'im right out of the service short off. They'll give 'im about twenty years in military prison first. Fall in to sound reveille."

Gray lined up with the others, and he held his precious old bugle to his lips, but it was not in him now to help sound that raucous, helter-skelter, noisy-go-lucky shatterer of the morning stillness:

Oh, I can't get 'em up,
    I can't get 'em up,
    I can't get 'em up this morrrrmin'.
The sergeants're worse than the corp'rals,
The corp'rals're worse than the privates,
And the colonel's worse than 'em all.
Oh, I can't get 'em up,
    I can't get 'em up,
    I can't get 'em up to-daaaaay.

The old chief musician, when reveille was finished, forgot breakfast in interest for his friend. He hurried to the artillery band barrack, which was Trumpeter Cart's quarters, and with the help of the wagon-soldiers, got Cart's blankets, soap, comb, tooth-brush, towel and a change of socks—the customary duty of a soldier for a comrade in the guard-house—and at the place of drinks where they had last drunk high regards to each other, he obtained tobacco and a half-pint of whisky. The bottle he smuggled into the guard-house among the other things under the very eye of the sergeant. And after that there was nothing to do but await the outcome.

When Chief Trumpter Cart came up before the general court, he was given an opportunity, as the saying was in the Army, to prove himself not guilty, but the colonel swore to the beating up and there was nothing left for Cart to swear to, so he sat mum, an old soldier utterly stupefied by the dishonor that had befallen him.

The court's finding and sentence were inevitable—Guilty, and to serve ten years in whatever military prison the authorities might direct, and dishonorable discharge.

As soon as the papers were forwarded to the reviewing officer, Gray, finding out by nosing around headquarters, took his courage in hand and went to the colonel's house. The officer met him on the porch.

"Sir," requested Gray in his best military manner, "may I speak to the colonel?"

"Well?"

"About Chief Trumpeter Cart, sir."

The colonel's lean, wrinkled face clouded swiftly. Gray hurried on:

"He was my friend, sir. We soldiered together off and on for nigh twenty-eight years. I knew him like a brother, sir, only better, and I know he meant ye no harm, colonel. It was only when the whisky got the upper hand——"

"But what do you think I can do?" asked the officer argumentatively.

"Write a letter, sir, through military channels or otherwise, and ask the judge advocate, when he reviews the case, to—that is, sir, suggest to him that you would not kick against leniency for Cart, and for old time's sake you'd like him restored to duty."

"That will do, Gray. You may go."

"Yes, sir."

And Gray went. There's no use to argue with the colonel in the Army.

But Gray's loyalty did not weary. He took dainties to the guard-house, and tobacco. Cart used a great deal of tobacco. He would smoke all day long and never say a word to anybody. The ignominy of his disgrace ate at his heart; he fell away physically, and presently was removed to the hospital for better care.

A few mornings after this significent event, getting out early to help as usual in sounding raucous reveille, Gray was again greeted with news from the bugler of the guard.

"Hello, dad," began the man, striving to be tactful, "you're the best bugler in the world now."

Gray halted, startled, knowing what the news would be.

"Old Cart-before-the-horse cashed in some time last night."

Gray was not shocked as he had been at the news of Cart's crime. He had felt that this would be the best way out. There was another consolation too—now, he would get to blow Taps over his comrade's grave, whereas if Cart had been taken away to some distant prison the chances of doing so would have been slight. And the chief would know—Gray felt that with all his being—Cart would hear and know about Taps being sounded and the promise kept.

Gray at once sought and obtained leave of absence for the day. He did not wish to remain around the barracks and be an object of pity, and he wished to go off and muse alone and practise Taps for final perfection.

He went to a near-by park, behind the garrison, and found a shady place and sat him down to the gentle practise of the army's favorite—it's sentimentality and its hymn, that ancient sweet wail called Taps.

Fades the light, and afar goeth day;
  Cometh night, and a star
Leadeth all, speedeth all to their rest.
  Friend, good night. Must thou go
When the day and the night leave me so?
  Fare thee well, day is done, night is on.

Sometimes he could not blow it all through for a hurt coming up in his throat.

While he dreamed there in the shade, and saw the past year by year unfold and fold again, and while at intervals he practised low, a man came from a house not far away, a retired soldier, and spoke to him.

"Hello, Gray," said he. "I'll bet a piece o' tin money you're practisin' Taps for old Trumpeter Cart."

"That's what," answered Gray shortly.

"I guessed it! Don't you know you'll never sound Taps at his grave? He's a military convict. Dishonorable soldiers don't get a military funeral."

Gray knew it, knew it as well as any man, but he had forgotten. This was the worst thing yet—the old chief not even to get an honorable funeral, like burying a once great man in the potter's corner without a friend to shed a tear, only a thousand times worse. His breathing was labored.

"Reminds me," began the retired man, "of a fellow in the Ninth Infantry——"

But old Gray had no ear for garrulity. He staggered to his feet and moved away, like Napoleon sunk in despair.

The national cemetery lay two or three miles distant. Down in one corner were a few ill-marked graves where men without military honor had been put away without the sound of bugle or firing of gun. Something drew Gray there.

He looked through the woven-wire fence at the long rows of low white grave-stones and the "little green tents" where the soldiers slept. He shortened his gaze, and right at his feet through the fence beheld the short row of mounds marked merely by boards. A new one would be dug there today, and tomorrow Chief Cart——

Gray turned away. He climbed the steep hillside right at hand and found another shady place near the summit. The hill was rocky and dry and nothing intervened to shut out the dismal corner. He would sit here the next day, when the hurrying squad lowered the body, and keep his promise with soft-blown Taps.

And he resumed his practising and his lonely musing.

When Chief Musician Gray returned to the garrison in the evening he learned that a regimental practise march had been ordered for the next day. He applied for permission to miss it and remain for Cart's burial. Pitying his sorrow, nobody objected. He was told at the guard-house that a detail of men to fill the grave would go out with a Q. M. wagon and the body at ten o'clock the next forenoon.

Gray was on the scene at half-past nine the following morning. He did not descend to the cemetery but remained on the hillside out of plain sight. He had his precious dented old bugle, polished in every visible inch, even within the bell, to a scintillating sheen. The chief, down there, would know!

The gray bugler sat down. By moving a little from behind the brushy clump he could see when the squad lowered the body. To make certain of this he moved over a yard—and was surprized to see already a fresh mound there. He got up and went racing to a last-chance saloon over on a main road conducted by an old retired soldier, and so situated that the proprietor could see everything that took place on his side of the cemetery.

"Say," Gray burst in like Paul Revere spreading the alarm, "there's a new grave down there in the disgrace corner——"

"Ol' Cart, chief trumpeter of the artillery outfit," said the proprietor. "Poor ol' hoss. I sho' felt declined to see him dropped down in sich a hole."

"When?" half-whispered Gray. "Why, I thought——"

"About eight-thirty. Boys come up here for a drink afta they got through. Said they'd hurried up 'count of having to go out on the practise hike."

So it was over and there had been no Taps for the chief.

THERE'S a saying in the army that you don't ever need to worry about orders for they may be changed several times before you can obey them. A few days later the sergeant-major of the infantry regiment beckoned the drooping gray old trumpeter into the headquarters building. When Gray reached his desk, the highest-ranking regimental noncom was beaming like a full moon.

"Here, read this," he said, shoving a printed sheet into Gray's hands. "See what the judge advocate says about y'r old sidekick."

"Judge advocate!" barked Gray.

And because of the sergeant-major's beaming he knew something had happened about Cart. He trembled so that he could not read. The headquarters man snatched the paper back and himself read it, omitting, hitting the high places.

" 'The findings of . . . owing to recommendations of the complaining officer . . . Colonel Malley . . . in view of age and honorable service of the soldier . . . findings of court reversed and Chief Trumpter Cart is ordered restored to duty with all rights and pay.' "

Old Gray was about to weep.

"Get out o' here!" thundered the sergeant-major, to hide his own feelings. "Malley himself wants to see ye. Report at once."

The gray bugler crossed the hall and knocked at the colonel's door and entered at the brusk order of, "Come!"

"Oh," said Malley pleasantly. "You had a promise with Chief Cart, did you not, Chief, to sound Taps at his grave?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sergeant-major tell you the news?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then it may interest you to know that orders have been given for the disinterment of Trumpeter Cart's body tomorrow and for burial in another place with full military honors."

"Yes, sir." Gray had never been more formal in all his military life. "I thank the colonel, sir, for—for——"

Tears squirted from Gray's eyes with the warm flush of a spring shower. Malley's eyes were tripping hard too.

"You'd better go, Chief," he said, hardly above a whisper. "You be on hand to sound your Taps at ten tomorrow."

Chief Musician Gray, with his shiny bugle, repaired to the cemetery much earlier than duty required. From the gate he saw a new grave in the "honorable row" and with peace in his heart sat down on a bench to wait.

Idly the old man got to trying the bugle limbering his lips, but his lips were dry and he decided to go to the saloon conducted by the retired soldier, only three or four blocks away, and get a drink to moisten them.

Trudging through the hot sunshine to the saloon yet another idea came to him, something that seemed fine and beautiful. Finally at the bar he carried out the plan.

"Two glasses, please," he ordered.

He filled them both with whisky and forgetting that the bartender was watching with a curious stare he stood back politely as if Chief Cart were there and gestured to the glasses. Then he took up one for himself.

"To the best bugler in the world, Chief," said he courteously.

He was not down-hearted, his voice did not break, for to his ears and eyes Cart was right there with him, and plainly he heard his old comrade say:

"To the best bugler in the world."

He drank and set his glass down, cleared his throat — ahm-ahm. He wiped his mouth, laid money down for his bill, and started to go.

"You're leavin' one of your glasses o' whusky," said the bartender.

"You're missin' the target," Gray replied coolly. "Old Chief Cart drunk that one."

"Oh, I see," acknowledged the man behind the bar, falling in with the whimsy. "Right ye are, an' we'll have another one on me, if you've got the time to spare."

Gray hesitated. He did not wish to be delayed. But the whisky he had swallowed was warming him and calling for more. He succumbed.

"Reckon I have time for one more," he agreed, "for the Chief's sake."

The bartender set out the quart bottle again with three fresh glasses. Gray poured three fingers for himself and likewise three for Cart, and the proprietor filled his own glass.

"Here's to a reunion in a soldier's heaven," he said splendidly, raising his glass.

The two in the flesh raised their glasses to each other, then both to the one who was present only in vision.

They drank.

"They're replanting him down there now, ain't they?" the bartender asked.

"Getting ready to; yes, sir."

"Cart was a great old wagon."

"You knew him well?" Gray inquired conversationally.

"Knowed him well? Say—I soldiered with him in Fort Sam Houston an' the Islands. I was with him—did he ever tell ye how he rode the water-buffalo into the fightin' to save—no? Well, say, you've got somethin' comin' in that story. It was like this——"

Gray gave a puzzled look back over his shoulder, trying in a troubled way to remember what it was he should be doing, but as the barman went ahead with his story the old bugler hooked his elbows over the bar and settled down to enjoyment of the yarn. The telling required some time, and when it was finished there were tears in Gray's faded eyes.

"Heroic," he murmured. "Old Chief to the life."

The bartender was so pleased with his successful spinning of the tale that he was renewedly liberal.

"Have another'n," he invited. "Ol' time's sake."

Again three glasses were filled and drunk.

"Reminds me—" The bartender chuckled. "Once Cart's outfit turned out for a colonel's funeral and——"

"Funeral!" Gray's mind came to attention. "Maybe I'd better be going. 'Scuse me. See you later."

With an overwhelming sense of guilt at idling so long and sick with the thought that he had again missed bugling for old Cart, Gray went hustling toward the cemetery, and when he came within sight, to his immeasurable relief he saw that nothing had gone too far, but that all was in readiness for the service.

Approaching nearer, arriving at the place at last, he beheld all the proper elements of such a military affair—chaplain, and a spic and span squad to fire the final salute, and himself as the official bugler.

He was dizzy, could not see well, but he understood when it came his time to sound the great call to glory. He stepped forward briskly. Old Chief Cart would hear and see and know all about it! It was a fine, stirring thought.

Gray raised the shiny bugle to his lips. He filled his lungs, reared back, and begun to sound off. But he made the great mistake of his military career. For instead of playing Taps he played the raucous, helter-skelter, noisy-go-lucky shatterer of funeral stillness—Reveille.

Oh, I can't get 'em up,
I can't get 'em up,
I can't get 'em up this morrrrning!

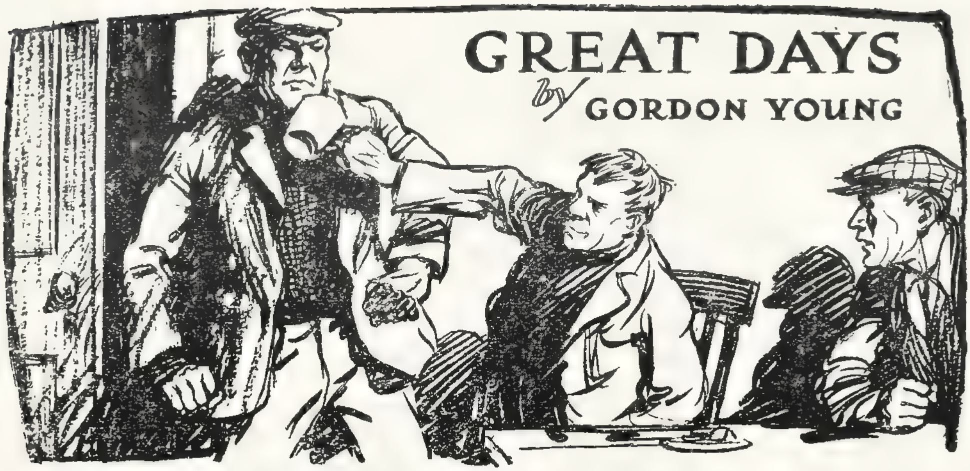
The stiff-back shave-tail in command of the firing squad shot a look at his men. Their young faces had the grim set expression of "attention," but their eyes were twinkling uncontrollably. The lieutenant stepped back to where Gray could not see and hissed out to the squad:

"If you men ever tell this on him while he's on earth I'll make you wish you hadn't! Get me?"

Contrary to all rules and regulations for men at attention, there came conspirators' nods and mutterings from the line. And even the chaplain laid a finger across his mouth in token that he joined them in the promise of silence.

A moment later Chief Musician Gray, now the best bugler in the world, with head up and chest out, was marching away by himself all unaware of his mistake, filled with the warmth of a promise well kept and duty well done.

"Old Chief Cart," said the chaplain softly, "would understand and forgive him. He meant right."



GREAT DAYS

by GORDON YOUNG

Author of “Pearl-Hunger,” “Standish of the Star Y,” etc.

“THE DUKE,” Dick Webster and ’Arry Coy, three sailormen without a ship, sat one forenoon at a square table far back in the barnlike dimness of the Rest Easy Saloon.

The Rest Easy was one of those large and nearly barren joints of the old waterfront, with thirty feet of bar up near the door, so that the thirsty traveler would not suffer from further fatigue after he had pushed back the swinging shutters; and the rest of the hundred feet toward the rear was given over to a half dozen small square tables beside the wall. Also near the wall, between the first table and the bar, was a tall pot-bellied stove on a sheet-iron mat—but a fire was never built. If anybody wanted to get warm he drank whisky or got into a fight. The black floor was lightly sprinkled with sawdust, and once or twice a week if somebody happened to think about it this was swept up, and fresh scattered about.

At the rear was a door opening in from the alley. Occasionally this was used as an entrance, but mostly as an exit. Mouchers, noisy fellows with empty pockets, bums that wanted to use a table for a bed, were pitched out of this rear door into the cobblestone alley, usually head first.

There was plenty of room for fighting in the Rest Easy, and anything went just as long as nobody tried to break up the furniture to get a club.

The three sailors were at the table nearest the alley.

A thin frothy glazing on the inside of the nearly emptied mugs showed the depth of each thirsty gulp that had drawn off the steam beer; and this low water mark, or beer mark, was in a way symbolic of their fortunes.

It was a spring morning, a May morning, but there was no cheery balminess about. The moist wind off the bay was as chilling as the air out of a mausoleum; a gray fog hovered outside, full of needle-pointed chill; and the streets seemed packed with crowds of ghosts, oppressive, cold, clammy, their swarm of shapeless bodies trailing in from a purgatorial ocean.

“Well, I’m glad we’re broke,” said Dick Webster, a burly, good-natured, but reckless rough-house sailorman, heavy of body, long of arm, with the blow of a ramming bowsprit in each fist. “I’m blastedly well sick of the town, of mud and noise and people, of walkin’ around on solid ground—like walkin’ on something dead. I want a ship!”

’Arry Coy paused to empty his mug, then clapped it heavily to the table.

“Now yer talkin’, Dick. But a ’ome. One wiv soft mates on ’er. No —— use in sober men like us gettin’ on a mankiller. Let them as ’asn’t done their bit sail wiv bluenoses. Me, Hi wants a ’ome!”

“No hungry ship,” said Webster, eying the bottom of his mug and debating whether to take the last gulp now or wait; but he took it, bottom to ceiling.

“Hi hear as the *Clarendon* gives yer molasses three times a day. Hi like that.”

“Where’s she bound for?” asked Webster.

“Yes, where, Duke? Hi don’t go round

no 'Orn. Not if Hi signs on when Hi 'm sober. Hi fell hoverboard last time round the 'Orn. Where's she bound for?"

"Melbourne," said the Duke, who read the shipping news.

"And she's short handed I hear Johnny Smith say."

"Le's try 'er?" said 'Arry Coy.

Feeling that they had discussed the matter thoroughly they set out for Johnny Smith's boarding house.

"A fine ship," said Johnny Smith, who had them down on his books. "A regular home, you bet. One family. The two mates—nice boys, them mates—are brothers. Their uncle's the Old Man."

"Old Man" had no reference whatever to age. It means Captain.

BY THE middle of the afternoon they were out spending what the crimp had left them of their advance, all eager to get rid of the last copper of the three months' wage, as yet unearned, before the following morning when they were due on board.

It was chilly weather and they wouldn't be ashore again for a long, long time, so they stepped pretty lively; and even the Duke, who was suspected of being a social scapegrace with some tragedy behind him, grew cheerful and almost light hearted. A few hot whiskies with steam-beer chasers, great platters of steaming free lunch, sauerkraut with weenies nestling in it, shrimps, bologna, celery, green olives, potato chips, deep bowls of clam chowder, with hot red slices of roast beef, pumpernickel and pretzels, crisp crackers heavily salted—all fine thirst producers—helped to make them feel that this was a pretty good old world, San Francisco a great little town after all, and that the *Clarendon* would be a home.

Everything was going fine. Webster, as usual, got into a crap game but his friends got him out again before he lost all his money.

'Arry Coy, who had a weakness for beauty, danced until he had enough in one of the toughest dumps on the Coast; and though his pockets were picked he didn't care, for there was nothing in 'em. Made wise by experience, he had stowed his money in his sock.

The Duke had spotted an ancient stone bottle of yellow Chartreuse on the shelf of a dive that had as many calls for soothing syrup as for cordials. He gave two-fifty for bottle and all, and the bartender thought him crazy because he sipped a thimbleful a drop at a time with a far away blissful light in his eyes.

At about ten o'clock that evening they drifted into a little all-night restaurant for something to eat, something substantial, like steaks two inches thick, fried onions and mushrooms with a couple of poached eggs and an order all round of French fried.

They were hardly at the table before a down-at-the-heels man, with a big wart on his cheek, near the nose, and eyes that were a bit cocked, came in from the street and said right off—

"Mates, I'm no moucher—look at them hands——"

He held them out, and showed the black streaks of tar in the salt water cracks of his hard hands.

"—I'm no moucher; but I've ducked off the worst heller that ever carried rotten grub to sea. I'm a stranger in this town and they're lookin' for me. I laid all day yesterday along the wharf waiting for the blankety-blank double-blanked mate to come ashore. But the captain come first. He was bad as the mate, so I heaved my rock alongside his head and—well, I got away. I didn't stop to explain to nobody that the old blankety-blank and his doubly blanked sons of two blanks had made a little ocean madhouse for us crew ever since we left Liverpool. I jumped across the street, through the front door of a saloon and out the back. Here I am, and hungry, mates. I took a good look at you out there as you went by—you're sailors. I'd like two bits for a meal and a bed. It's a cold night, mates."

The Duke suspected that the modesty of his request was due to a bit of cunning knowledge as to the generosity of sailormen, but he made no comment.

"Set down!" said Webster, heartily, pulling out the chair beside him.

"Two bits, ——," cried 'Arry Coy, digging down in his sock. "'Ere's two iron men, an Hi'll pay for wot yer can swallow now, Hi will!"

"Make yourself at home," said Duke, continuing to give the fellow a close scrutiny.

The man sat down readily.

The Duke drew his stone bottle from a

coat pocket and with ceremonial deliberation held it up to view.

"We have here something rare, very rare. How it ever got on a Barbary Coast shelf is beyond my feeble powers of conjecture. But you see here the far-famed liquor of the Carthusian monks, who, being forbidden the use of grape or grain, interceded with Heaven for some relief from their fate; and Heaven, hearing their prayer, bestowed upon them the gift of brewing from a weed, a mere weed, this most exalted of cordials."

Having properly prepared them for an appreciation of his treasure, the Duke proceeded to serve it.

His guests were all set for a drink, and eyed with distrust the bare tablespoonful of yellow fluid that he watchfully poured into each of the four beer glasses the waiter had brought.

'Arry Coy gave his spoonful a critical inspection; Webster moistened his lips thirstily; the stranger lifted his to his nose sniffing audibly. It did look more like a smell than a drink.

Then with outraged feelings the Duke saw his three companions tip their glasses and at one swallow suck down the thick liquor; after which they looked blankly at one another.

"Now we'll 'ave some beer," said 'Arry Coy, beating the table with a knife handle and looking for the waiter.

"Aye," said Webster. "Steam beer."

"Mates," said the stranger, "I only hope as how I'll never have the chanct to do as much for you as you're doin' for me, 'cause before that could be, you'd have to put in five months of double-dyed damnation on board the rotten old tub of a *Clarendon!*"

If their guest had hit them with a three-spiked club the momentary silence would not have been more complete.

'Arry Coy was able to speak first. He gasped—

"Wot!"

Webster's deep voice came in with—

"What's that!"

The Duke, who had been reflectively touching the edge of his glass to get the flavor without diminishing the liquor, said:

"Will you please repeat that name? It seems to have a familiar sound."

The runaway sailor obligingly repeated all he had said, adding elaborate variations that affirmed the *Clarendon* to be a leaky craft where good men were chained to the pumps. Aye, she was so blastingly bad that he'd known it to be watch and watch at the pump, with the watch below getting its rest by working ship, and sleeping as it could about the deck. The food was rotten. The pork was hunks of dried salt dipped in grease; the beef so rank that they used to drive away sharks by heaving chunks of it overboard. And the skipper and mates drew their pay from the forfeited wage of runaway sailors.

'Arry began to talk to his empty beer glass, calling it "Ol' Pal," and telling it what an unlucky world this was and how after taking the greatest care in the world to pick a 'ome they had signed on a 'eller. He demanded to know why anyhow were sailormen ever born?

Webster grinned in a silly way, looking just about as he would have looked if a friend, too much of a friend to fight, had dropped an oyster down the back of his neck.

"My friend," said the Duke, eying the stranger in a cool appraising way, "you are passing remarks about *our* ship."

The fellow stared blankly.

"Your ship? What you givin' me? You fellers ain't off the *Clarendon.*"

"Tomorrow morning we'll be on her. We signed today."

"Then the —— help you. He owns her from truck to keelson!"

II

SOMEWHERE near midnight the three sailors were back in the Rest Easy Saloon, at the table nearest the rear door, through which an occasional patron who knew his way in the alley entered.

A lot of night owls and barflies were gathered up at the bar around a party of slummers who thought they were seeing life because they drank with soaks and spongers that had been accompanying them from waterfront saloon to saloon, showing them about. Some of them already called the fattest and loudest of these spenders by his first name, which was George, and patted him on the back; and he liked it.

The Duke, 'Arry and Webster had stood at the bar until this mob drifted in; then, being respectable sailormen, they had gone as far off as they could without leaving the Rest Easy, for they liked the size of its beer mugs.

So again they sat moodily staring at empty mugs. Their money was about gone, long before free lunch, or bought, had lost its flavor, beer its glow, whisky its warmth.

They had made inquiries here and there and found that, if anything, the runaway sailor seemed to have somewhat understated the conditions on the *Clarendon.* Lots of people appeared to have heard about her. Hearsay gave her a bad name. She was a madhouse, right. The mates were reported to be holy terrors. The report of molasses three times a day was scornfully dismissed as more unfounded than the report that ice cream is served for breakfast in the lower regions.

"But look here," said Webster to his mates as they sat unhappily eying one another. "I been on the worst hookers that float. No matter how bad they come, if you do your work, step lively, keep gaskets on your tongue, you get along."

"Wise words," said the Duke. "Ought to be written on a little sign and tacked to the scuttle butt—with your name as author."

Webster went on, ignoring the Duke's opinion—

"And there's always something that comes your way. No matter how bad a mess you're in, something turns up."

"Turns up and knocks you off your feet," added the Duke, who had relapsed into one of his morose moods.

"Yer right, Dick, ol' son. Yer right. that time Hi went hoverboard off Cape 'Orn, the water it was full of hice. But Hi said, ' 'Arry, ol' dear, it's something to 'ave the water cold. Yer know there's no sharks habout.' An' when they fished me hout they give me 'ot whisky, they did. That was something, too—off the 'Orn."

Said the Duke:

"I'm really getting interested in this *Clarendon.* Everybody hates her so. Besides, I didn't like that fellow off of her. He smelt suspiciously of the Chartreuse before he swallowed it. And his eyes didn't match."

It hadn't even occurred to them not to go aboard the *Clarendon.* They had put their names to her papers, they had taken her advance, spent it, and sail with her they would though she cleared for the Sulphur Lake.

"Besides," said Webster, "I hate a ship where the crew grows fat. Makes 'em snore nights, being fat. Spoils your sleep."

"Right-ho!" cried 'Arry. "Who would pick a heasy ship? Ol' men an' farmers. Give me the 'ellers ever'time. Hi'm a sailor, Hi am!"

And 'Arry banged his mug defiantly.

A moment before 'Arry's boastful words would have been safe enough, and have passed into thin air along with the filmy wisp of smoke that rose from the cigaret between his pipe-stem fingers.

But two men had just entered through the alley door. One of these men was broad shouldered, short in the neck, with a thick head and a square face; he had a short hooked nose and bushy brows overhanging hard blue eyes. There was something masterful about him and contemptuous.

The other was younger, but cut from the same timber; there was a slight sameness in the mold of features, the short thick neck, the hard eyes, the ——-take-the-world swing of his shoulders.

"Hi'm a sailor, Hi am!" 'Arry had shouted and they heard him.

THE big man stopped short and laughed, contemptuous, and amusedly regarded the mosquito-like form of the little Cockney.

"Sailor—you!"

"Hi am, so Hi ham!" snapped 'Arry, looking fierce.

"Here Frank, see what calls hisself a sailor! Ain't he cute? If he ever goes to sea I bet he takes along a doll to sleep with. Why, you little biscuit weevil, if I ever got you to sea I'd stick you in a cage with my parrot and let him teach you—"

'Arry's heavy mug flew up and struck the man in the face.

But the man took the terrific and unexpected blow as if the mug had been made of rubber. His head moved back a little, but the blow seemed hardly to jar him. It was as if every day of his life he was used to being walloped in the face with beer mugs; and the next instant with a sidelong swipe of open palm he had knocked 'Arry from his chair and far out on the floor.

"Sailor—O!" shouted the square-faced one, and laughed.

Webster got up, overturning his chair backwards in his haste, and shedding his coat as he rose.

"Buck—look out!" shouted the one called Frank, who then himself lunged forward at Webster with a fist balanced to swing.

But Webster spilled him with a right to the jaw, then ducked—but not low enough, and Buck's knuckles ripped the skin on the back of his head.

Webster straightened up with a haymaker to the jaw's tip, and Buck took two steps backward.

"I see we're going to put on a show," he said as he dropped his coat behind him. "Begins to seem like home!"

With that he rushed.

Frank, coming to his feet, gathered himself to take Webster from the rear, for this was a bar-room row, and the Marquis of Queensbury never had a great deal of influence along the waterfront.

But before Frank got under weigh, the Duke was before him.

The Duke was tall, straight, with sensitive features and an ease of manner that was almost too graceful to be manly. The Duke knew the Marquis of Queensbury and respected him. He now held his hands like a boxer's, not to be tightly shut until the blow was on its way. But there was no crouch, no scowl of brow, no sneering twist of lips to the side of clenched jaw. The Duke was a good man with his fists, though in a fight to the finish Webster was the better. With the Duke, fighting was more than a science—it was an art.

For a moment Frank hesitated as one hesitates before something odd. But when he started he came headlong, with short neck shortened; and the Duke drove a right straight to his nose, starting the blood, then he stepped deftly aside as Frank's heavy fist whirled through the air.

Instantly, again, the Duke threw a right to the nose, following it with a lightning left that raised a bump on Frank's right eye.

Frank lunged, swinging right and left. The Duke moved his head three inches and the right missed, shifted his feet and the left went wild.

"What the ——!" Frank roared. "Why don't you stand still!"

The Duke stepped in, drove one knot of knuckles into Frank's stomach, another against the dripping nose and slid out again.

The Duke, being an artist and not caring to nurse broken hands, picked out soft spots for his knuckles.

Frank hit the air a mighty blow. The Duke ducked, rose, put one fist against the sore nose, reached to the short ribs with the other, then moved his head back two inches beyond the hurtling fist that described a full half-circle in a sweeping reach to knock him through the wall.

The Duke then shifted his feet, feinted for the head, and as Frank raised his arms to guard the precious nose, the Duke crouched low, bent forward and whipped an overhand right into the pit of Frank's stomach.

Frank gasped as if suddenly stricken with asthma, clapped both hands to his stomach, half turned and sank to the floor, nearly unconscious, but huddling himself into a knot, in the midst of his helplessness protecting his head as much as he could, for he expected to be kicked all over the place.

Nothing happened. By trying hard he got a bit of air inside of him, then opened his eyes.

The Duke was standing by, hands at the side, waiting, watching.

"Get up," said the Duke, "and we'll finish it."

"I can't," gasped Frank, writhing as he tried.

"Allow me to help you," said the Duke, putting out his hand and stooping.

"Go to ——," said Frank. "I know when I'm licked."

He groaned, and twisted himself around to see what was going on there in the center of the room that shook the floor with heavy tread and stamping. The air was filled with the sound of smack and crack of fist to face.

But he could see nothing except a twinkling glimpse between the legs of onlookers that had circled round the fighters.

The slummers and their party of hangers-on were gathered there, having lost all interest in the other fight as soon as Frank hit the floor and stayed down. The big spender was a large-bellied man, with a heavy watch charm dangling over his stomach; he had flabby cheeks and a loose mouth, and a patronizing air of good fellowship. His two friends were much like him, well fed, with sleek cheeks, freshly scraped and perfumed by a barber. The sort of fellows, they were, that get into ringside seats and yell their heads off, but grow wobbly in the knees at the smell of a fist.

Elbow to elbow they now stood with the mouchers, the fellows that were never seamen, but hung about the waterfront, taking the drinks of free-handed sailors, patting Jack on the back, and rolling him if he staggered in a dark place. Some of them held beer mugs from which they took an occasional sip, but with eyes steady over the rim so as to miss nothing.

The proprietor of the Rest Easy, a hard man, as he had to be in order not to be once in a while kicked out of his joint by some peevish stevedore, but a bit bloated from too much sampling of his own goods, had tucked his white apron into the waistband of his trousers and, bungstarter in hand to see fair play, stood in the front rank of the onlookers, twisting a drooping mustache with his free hand. Both fighters were strangers, so he played no favorite; and his idea of fair play merely forbade the use of knife, club or gun. Anything else went. A fellow could use whatever Nature, assisted by the shoemaker, had given him.

Buck was a hard-knuckle scrapper. He believed in taking what the other fellow had to give and in handing back what he could.

Webster's knuckles were as hard as any man's; and the Duke, in a friendly way, had from time to time poked his nose until Webster learned a bit about guarding and ducking—but the smallest bit imaginable.

Like all rough fighters, they struck for the face; and most of the blows went home. Each of Webster's fists had the weight of a twelve pound sledge, and Buck was as big a man, with the driving power of a jibing boom in his arms.

'Arry Coy had picked himself up, and while he danced about like a one-legged man in an egg race, he squawked encouragement to his champion.

Buck and Webster went to it with smash and crash, crouch and swing.

Then Webster put over a whirling fist and knocked Buck down.

Buck rolled over with a cat-like backward scramble just in time to miss the swing of a hobnailed foot; then coming to a crouch rushed forward, headlong.

This rapid recovery caught Webster off guard, and the half-ton blow to the jaw spun him around and dumped him over.

He lighted on his back, and as Buck came on, reckless with triumph, Webster shot out both feet.

Buck recovered his balance some ten feet back. By that time Webster was up again, and they went to it, swinging, lurching, lunging.

"Pretty work," commented the critical proprietor, tucking the bungstarter under an arm and beginning to roll a cigaret, but without moving his eyes from the fight.

George and his two fat friends were purple in the face from excitement. They hopped up and down, eager to see the blood flow, a man go down and stay there. They whooped and pranced, having the time of their lives, seeing a real fight.

Both fighters were soon breathing like a pair of porpoises that come to the top after dodging a swarm of sharks.

They stood toe to toe, swinging right and left and back again. Their arms were a bit slower in getting started, but the blows had weight and they took them without flinching.

Then Webster put over one that nearly shut Buck's left eye by cutting the skin of the overhanging brow; and Buck, stung to extra strength, dropped a bunch of knuckles squarely against Webster's mouth, loosening teeth and making the lips puff up like a mushroom.

Blinded a bit by the blood, Buck stepped back and wiped his face with a tattooed forearm.

"Had enough?" said Webster.

"—— no! I just stopped to ask what graveyard your family uses!"

And they were at it again.

"Good boys," said the proprietor of the Rest Easy approvingly as he blew a stream of smoke through his nose and gave an upward pull to his mustache.

George was howling his delight, and struck pudgy palm to thigh in admiration of Buck's wit.

"Heat 'im hup, Dick! Heat 'im hup!" yelled 'Arry Coy, jumping about, shadow boxing to illustrate.

BUT the men now fought with weary muscles. Their arms dragged, being so tired they would almost drop from the weight of the fists swinging at long range—so they moved in closer, almost belly to belly. They now made no effort to duck or guard, counting it so much lost motion; no effort to dodge, only to strike. But they hammered away, fighting on without rest, time or referee, breathing hoarsely, swinging as if lifting weights.

It was a fight to the finish, but they were too nearly matched, too full of iron bones and sinewy muscles and the unyielding heart for either to give up before he was down and out.

The spirit was willing, but the muscles were exhausted; and slugging on and on wore down their strength until at last they leaned against each other for support and listlessly prodded their sides with blows that wouldn't have mashed a fly.

"Fight it out, boys. Go on, fight it out! Don't be quitters—fight it out!" yelled George. "Don't show yellow. Fight it out!"

They couldn't fight, but neither would quit.

Between them there were three blackened and one blinded eye, a swollen mouth, a pair of puffed ears each, and patches on each cheek that would by dawn be black and purplish.

At last they stood motionless, pushing weakly, heads loosened, mouths open, arms hanging, but their eyes still full of challenge.

"Well, you've had enough," said the proprietor of the Rest Easy as he pushed them apart. "But it was a pretty good fight in spots."

"The drinks are on me—everybody drinks. The drinks are on me!" cried George importantly as he bustled forward to pat the fighters on the back and lead them to the bar. "Everybody drinks—I'm buying!"

But Buck drew back with a sullen glow in his one good eye.

"Count me out," he said, crouching his head on his short neck and giving George a glare that weakened his knees. "I buy my own and drink with good men, not with a bunch of potbellied barflies like you and this crowd of bums that's grinned to see better men than they ever were take a beating!"

"Here, what's this—what's this!" shouted the proprietor of the Rest Easy, who had seen the size of the slummers' rolls and knew that they were in a mood for spending. "Where do you get that stuff?"

He gripped his bungstarter and glared.

But Buck looked as if in the short breathing space he might have recovered enough for at least one more good wallop.

Then Webster muttered, "I'm with you mate," and shifted about a bit, his knotted fists dangling as he stood shoulder to shoulder with Buck. "I'm with you if you want to clean this dump!"

"Well," roared the proprietor of the Rest Easy, who was his own bouncer and had great faith in the bungstarter, "if you bums feel that way about it, get out of my place. Get out! What do you mean anyhow, making a roughhouse in here. Get out!"

"Get out, ——!" roared a third voice, and Frank, who had been resting a long time, came to the front with a pair of fists hanging low.

The Duke quietly appeared beside Webster and his dark eyes fastened on the face of George.

And 'Arry Coy, a heavy mug in each hand, took up a strategic position on the proprietor's flank.

"We drink, and we drink here, and I pay for it!" said Webster as well as he could, speaking between puffed lips.

"We drinks 'ere we does!" repeated 'Arry Coy.

The proprietor glanced around, saw the strategic position, took a look at the beer mugs. Then he quietly stuck his bungstarter under a fold of the white apron and smiled cheerily:

"That's all right. No hard feeling, boys. The drinks are on the house."

A pleased buzzing went up from the hangers-on, and ended suddenly as Buck said:

"No, not for me. I'm no bum and I don't drink with bums!"

The Duke took a step aside and with an air of firm politeness said to George:

"I suggest that you and your friends use the back door—it's the nearest!"

George, good spender that he was, always self-sure of a welcome in any company, gave an astounded pop-eyed glare; then, offended:

"Well, if you feel that way——"

"I feel just that way," said the Duke quietly, with a glow in his eyes that gave the three well-fed men a chilly sensation.

They turned huffily and walked out, but through the front door, thereby soothing their pride, and feeling valiant.

"Whisky for me," said Buck. "I need it."

And he grinned at Webster.

"I pay," said Frank, a hand on the Duke's arm. "I'm the only one that took the count."

"Like —— yer is!" shouted 'Arry Coy, flinging away his beer mugs. "Didn't Hi go to sleep on the bloomin' floor, first off? Hi did so Hi did. Hi pay!"

Five men lined up, and there was money on the bar before each of them.

Some of the blowzy onlookers had eased themselves out the door, hopefully trailing after the fat gentlemen who had been down on the waterfront, seeing life; but others sidled together at the end of the bar, and coughed as they cast expectant eyes toward the proprietor, innocently trusting that he would remember what had been said about the next one being on the house.

But he didn't. That was off. He didn't even send a glance in their direction.

Five glasses were deftly scooted into position. The bottle was slapped down.

Buck passed it to Webster, who shoved it back with —

"You first."

"Not me," said Buck. "There's too many good men here."

Then, leaning over the bar he eyed 'Arry Coy, who was lined up beside Webster, he said—

"Here you—you started all that other thing, now start this!"

And he gave the bottle a shove that sent it sliding along the polished wood to 'Arry.

The glasses were filled, and Buck looked right and left to see that all were set; then lifting his own, he said to Webster:

"Here's to you, whoever the —— you are. You're a good man. I never met a better. Me, I'm Buck Davis, and this is my brother Frank, mates on the *Clarendon*. A rip-roarin' hooker she is for farmers and soldiers, but sailors—why, blast your old heart, a man like you can spit on her deck!"

'Arry Coy had his liquor halfway down before he heard the ship's name; then he coughed and spluttered as if drowning himself.

They gathered round and pounded him on the back until he could breathe again.

"He's used to milk," said Webster.

"Ought to wear a bib," suggested Frank.

"I've told him whisky was a man's drink," said the Duke severely.

"Don't let them kid you, lad. You're all right," said Buck, shoving over the bottle again. "And you've got a man's wallop with a beer mug."

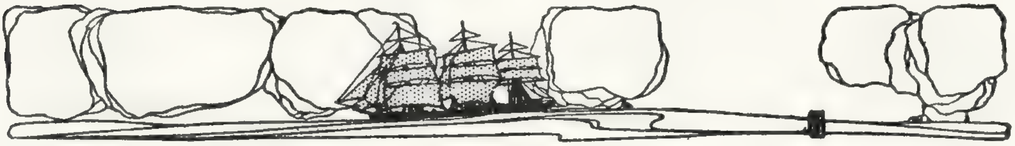
"Hi say—Hi say, Mister Davis, wot habout a feller wiv a mole on 'is nose wot used to be on yer ship?"

"That swab! I'd like to lay hands on him again. Two days out of Liverpool the carpenter lost his watch. The crew had suspicions and searched the forecastle, and found it under the blankety-blank's donkey feed. He knuckled under and begged to stay out of irons. I had him switched to my watch, and I kept him hoppin' like a fish on a skillet. He jumped ship here and has been goin' up and down the waterfront giving the *Clarendon* a bad name. Why, from a dozen men this night I've heard her ill-spoken of—but they changed their minds when I put in my word. And the cross-eyed piece of a shark's gut yesterday heaved a rock at the Old Man. Miss him he did; but I wish he'd try heavin' one at me! The lying swab!"

"Hi say, Mister Davis. Hi say, 'ow habout molasses on yer ship?"

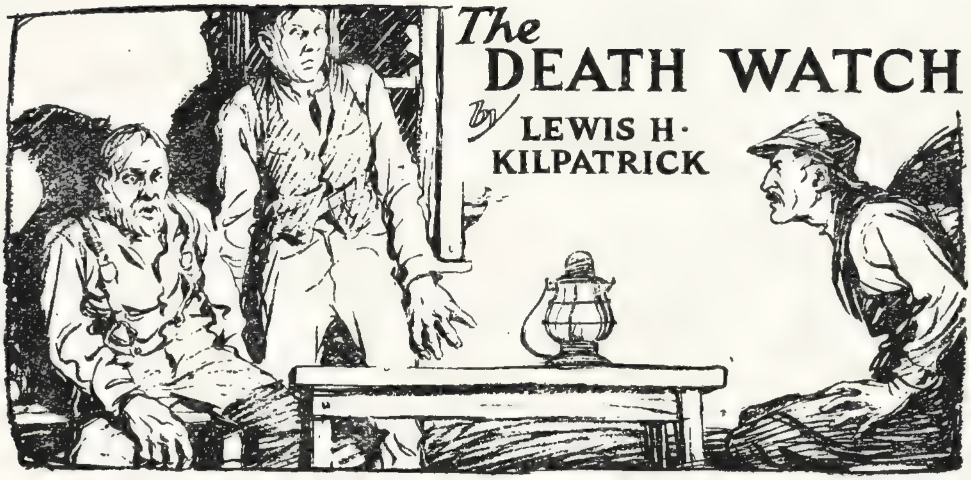
"Three times a day. The Old Man uses it instead of sugar, lots of it. He thinks sailors like sweet stuff. Says it's food for 'em."

"Wot did Hi tell yer, Dick?" 'Arry Coy whispered to Webster. "Wot did Hi tell yer? That she would be a 'ome! Hi 'ad the 'unch!"



The DEATH WATCH

by LEWIS H. KILPATRICK



Author of "Mountain Pride," "The First Born," etc.

THE MAN was dead. Sheriff Clint Hawkins swung himself from his horse, threw the reins to his mounted deputy, young Andy Spurlock, and knelt beside the prone form in the middle of the mountain road.

Early morning mists were still clouding the adjacent valleys; the summits of the Kentucky hills had not yet begun to glow with the first touch of the rising sun; and a heavy dew, dripping from the overhanging trees, had laid the roadway dust, which showed no marks of travel that dawn except the hoof-prints of the two horsemen.

"It's old John Bradshaw!" exclaimed the big sheriff, lifting a canvas haversack that covered the dead face. "Uncle Johnny Bradshaw, the colporter!*" he repeated. "Gosh, Andy—and he's been murdered!"

Young Spurlock, a dark-complexioned, strong-featured mountaineer, slipped from his own saddle and joined his chief beside the body.

Andy represented the law in the Red River section of the county. The day before he and Clint hunted down a pack of wild dogs that had been killing calves in that region, spent the night at the nearest village, Rothwell, and at daybreak started back to the county seat. They were little more than a mile on their way when halted by the grim figure in the road.

"Shot through the heart," declared Andy, pointing to John Bradshaw's left breast, its cheap cotton shirt crimson with undried blood. "Bushwhacked, I reckon, from behind these trees along here."

"Naw," Sheriff Hawkins corrected a moment later.

He had opened the shirt, and was examining the soaked underwear and the wound beneath it. "No bullet made that hole," he said. "The colporter was stabbed, kilt by one jab of a broad-blade knife in a mighty strong hand.

"And look here, Andy," he ejaculated. "There's a slit in the undershirt but none in the b'iled shirt—and both were buttoned up tight. Now how on earth could that be?"

The deputy frowned over the question, confirming Clint's statement for himself, and then carefully scrutinized the dead man's other clothing. His worn derby hat lay just where it might have dropped if he had fallen suddenly; every garment was in place, but on his feet were only a pair of yarn socks. A glance showed, too, that their soles were dustless.

"Clint, he's been robbed o' his shoes."

Andy's puzzled frown deepened and he rose.

"But who'd kill a man jest fer them, anyway?" he wondered. "Most folks in these mountains go barefoot durin' warm weather."

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*Colporter (also colporteur) in the Anglo-Saxon sense is "one who is engaged by a religious society or association to travel about and distribute or sell religious books, tracts, etc." (Encyclopædic Dictionary, Hunter and Morris.) The term colporter, now practically obsolete elsewhere, survives in the Kentucky mountains, where pedlers of religious books still ply their trade.

"The Death Watch," copyright, 1924, by Lewis H. Kilpatrick.

Clint Hawkins plucked at his sandy mustache thoughtfully. Then he took hold of the inert body and rolled it over on its side. The ground beneath was dry, untouched by the heavy dew.

"Hump!" he grunted, also getting to his feet. "Andy, the old feller wasn't kilt here or nowhere near here. There ain't a house with anybody living in it for a mile around. He was undressed and in bed when it happened. Whoever done it, put all his clothes on him except his shoes, packed him here and laid him down in the middle of the road."

He continued his deductions:

"Uncle Johnny was stabbed while he was asleep, I'd jedge, a little before midnight. It was ten o'clock when me 'n' you got to bed, and the clouds were just beginning to clear then. Feel how damp his clothes are. I'd say by that and the looks of the ground under him that he was fetched here no later than two o'clock, before the hardest dew commenced to fall."

The deputy nodded, agreeing with the theory.

"But who'd want to harm ole Uncle Johnny?" he broke out again. "He was a furriner and a parson in his day, afore he begun comin' up here to peddle church books. Ever'body in my part o' the county was glad to enjoy him fer the night as often as he'd drap by. I can't think what he could 'a' done to make a feller destroy him like this."

Clint stooped and picked up the large canvas haversack he had removed from John Bradshaw's face. The colporter used it to carry his books when he tramped from house to house through the hills. In it now were just three inexpensive, cloth-bound Bibles.

"My idea is that he wasn't kilt because of anything he done," said the sheriff, "but for the money he had on him.

"About three weeks ago," he recalled, "he came to town with this poke full of books, starting first for your Red River country. Several days passed and he was back in town, sold out, and got two bundles of twenty-five Bibles each that were waiting for him at the post-office. I seen him then, and he 'lowed he was going north along Beaver Creek, turn west at the county line, and circle round to the narrow gage at Rothwell or Chambers Station. By that time he'd 'a' covered the hull county and be ready to go home to the settlements."

Sheriff Hawkins held up the haversack.

"Whoever destroyed him wasn't after Bibles neither, else he'd took these. That feller was after the money—almost a hundred dollars, I'd guess—that Uncle Johnny'd got for his books. He was robbed, all right, and more's the shame to these Kaintucky hills!"

Both men stood for a minute, silent, looking down at the lifeless face of John Bradshaw. Smooth shaven and sunburned, crowned by thinning gray hair, there was no memory of final anguish on the beneficent features. The sunken eyes were closed and death had erased many wrinkles from about the aging mouth. A great and welcomed peace seemed to have descended on the old colporter with the thrust of the assassin's knife.

Clint Hawkins sighed.

"Wal, Andy, the first thing is take care of him; then we've got to learn who's guilty of his murder."

HE made a quick survey of the surrounding territory. At that point the state road ran almost due north and south, and leading into it from the west was a county mud road. John Bradshaw's body could have been brought from any one of the three directions to the forks, and that spot obviously was selected to confuse the inevitable investigation.

There was only one house in sight. That, a log cabin, was beyond the northwest angle of the forks, in the middle of a brushy bottomland, some two hundred yards from the road. The cabin was empty, Clint knew, abandoned the preceding Winter by the surviving member of a family that had been almost wiped out by smallpox.

"We'll tote Uncle Johnny over yonder," the sheriff decided, "and keep him until the undertaker fixes him up and I can telephone down to Hinkston. He named it to me several times that Hinkston was his home."

The two men picked up the body, found a gap in the post-and-rail fence that bordered the road, and laboriously carried it along a brier-tangled, disused path to the cabin.

The house had only one room, with a loft above, and no floor but the packed naked earth. Its last occupant, moving hurriedly, had left three handmade chairs, a bench, a rude table and a bed built against the wall near the rock fireplace. There was a single window, unglassed; the walls and raftered ceiling were bare, and at the end of the room opposite the fireplace was a ladder leading to the loft.

Clint and Andy laid their burden on the bed frame, and then young Spurlock returned to the road for his horse.

"Thar ain't no danger o' anybody comin' here," he remarked, after tethering the horse in a thicket behind the cabin. "Smallpox has made this shack worse feared than a gallows."

"That's just as we want it," said the sheriff, already planning his day's work. "You stay here, Andy, and keep out of sight. I'll send you your dinner and supper by the undertaker. Now I'm off to town."

Sheriff Hawkins went back to the road and first searched the immediate surroundings for further clues. But he found none, the shifting dust and the dew having obliterated all foot and hoof prints made during the night. The nearest bloodhounds were at Lexington, in the central Blue Grass, and could not be got to the scene before the next day. Clint rejected the thought of sending for them, mounted his horse and started at a canter toward the county seat, four miles away.

He had not gone far, however, when he met a drove of cattle. Behind them rode fat Sam Tabor, a shrewd middle-aged trader, who lived on a nearby farm.

"Howdy, Clint!" he called genially.

"Howdy, Sam," responded the sheriff, eyeing him keenly as they came abreast.

"Ye're out mighty early this fine mornin'," said the trader, always eager for gossip. "Has anything happened whar yo' come from?"

"Naw," Clint evaded, "everything's quiet these days. I spent the night at Rothwell and I'm just a-goin' home."

Sam Tabor loved money, he analyzed, riding on, but he was hardly the kind of man who would commit murder for less than a hundred dollars. Yet the sheriff's experience had taught him to suspect every one possibly connected with a crime until the guilty party was actually found. Many a supposedly good citizen used such a reputation for cover when he wished to break the law.

A mile farther Clint Hawkins' meditations were interrupted by a double hallo. Gus Skaggs and his bearded father, Reuben, both afoot, had come down a mountain trail at the right of the road, headed in the direction from which Clint had come.

"You boys ain't set up a still in these parts, have you?" he inquired, checking his horse.

Reuben and Gus grinned faintly. Their business was an open secret.

"We worked all last night over with Jeb Fraley," drawled the elder Skaggs. "Jeb's been havin' trouble gittin' his mash to sour proper, and he called on a couple o' experts to help him find what was wrong. We'uns did."

"Wal," replied Clint, good humoredly, "just so you and him keep on making pure corn liquor, that don't pizen nobody, that's all I care. I've got too much other devilment to worry about to fool with a few moonshine stills."

The Skaggses showed no inclination to continue the conversation. They were plainly sleepy and tired, and lived three miles up the mud road from the forks, on a branch of Licking River. The sheriff had no reason to detain them. He was the gladder, however, that he and Andy Spurlock had happened along before any one else began traveling the highway that morning.

IT WAS still early when he reached the county seat. There he saw George Duff, the village undertaker, and swore him and his assistant to secrecy before he started them to the cabin morgue. Next he sent for his second deputy, grizzled Dave Arnett, to come to his office in the court house. He told Dave in detail what had happened and confided his deductions.

"In a house," he continued, "not so many miles from where we found Uncle Johnny, is a pair of brown shoes that are going to help send some feller to the 'lectric chair. I remember them shoes well. The old man had split 'em across the toes to ease his feet in walking. He had 'em on when he was here less than a week ago.

"Howsomever," Clint added, "we can't search every house in the north and west parts of the county. We've got to learn about where Uncle Johnny put up last night. Then, when we're down to just a few houses, the real hunting will begin."

Dave Arnett, a taciturn mountaineer of sixty-two, still vigorous in mind and body, rubbed his lean jaw doubtfully.

"Circumstantial evidence, as they call hit, don't often git a conviction," he observed. "And hit's likely that them split-toed shoes have been burned 'r buried afore now."

"Yes," admitted the sheriff, "there's a chance of it. But that ain't the only trail I'm following. I'm after more than just circumstantial evidence.

"Now, Dave," he ordered, "you get on your horse and strike for Rothwell. Begin there, keep on down the narrow gage to Chambers Station, then turn north and bear to the east until you reach the Slate Fork of Licking River. Stop by every house along the way and ask cautious if the folks there have seen Uncle Johnny Bradshaw of late. You'll get done a hour before sundown, when I want you to meet me at the cabin. By that time I'll have covered my territory and we'll be ready for the closing in."

Deputy Arnett accepted the commission with a brief nod and a hitch at his pistol belt, and left the room.

Clint Hawkins made sure that his own .38 special was securely holstered on his right hip and that he had a supply of extra cartridges. He then went to the county judge's office, had him assume the duty of communicating with the Hinkston authorities about the colporter's body, and swore out a sheaf of John Doe search warrants which he put carefully in his pocket.

Half an hour later he again was in the saddle, going northeast from town along the Beaver Creek Road.

"This is the only real robbery that's happened in the county since I've been sheriff," Clint muttered to himself as he gave the horse a loose rein. "Of course a mountain man will steal a stray barrel, if he's a 'shiner, or a fat chicken when he's hungry, or a juicy ripe watermelon that's laying convenient to his path. But it's always been a fact up here in these hills that, while most everybody is dog poor, nobody is low and mean enough to rob for money."

The burly sheriff might wink at moonshining and bloodless shooting affrays, but he felt the present crime a challenge to his official pride and native honor.

JOHN BRADSHAW, whose pension as a superannuated minister was too meager to support him, had spent the Summers since his retirement sellings Bibles, hymn books and other religious literature through the hill counties nearest his Blue Grass town. A kindly, curious old man, he sang psalms as he tramped the winding trails, his back bent under his pack, a staff aiding his tireless feet.

Folk soon began to call him "Uncle," a complimentary title like that of "Colonel" in the Kentucky lowlands, indicating affection and respect. He always paid for his lodging at a mountain home by leaving one of his books, although the gift was never requested and often protested because of its value to him.

Sheriff Hawkins had no difficulty in tracing the colporter's late journey through the northeastern section of the county. A "furriner"' was recognized and remembered everywhere, especially one with whom the people were familiar.

"Have you all seen anything of Uncle Johnny Bradshaw these last several days?" Clint would ask, stopping at a house. "I've got a letter that came for him in my care, and happening this way where I knew he'd headed, I 'lowed I might catch up with him."

At intervals he found a home where the colporter had eaten a meal or spent the night, and frequently was shown a Bible which had been purchased from him.

Yes, Uncle Johnny had come by just a few days agone. He seemed weary, and the man had set him a chair while the wife fetched him a gourd of cool spring water and a piece of dried-apple pie. Joe Wells picked him up in his wagon then and took him to the next house. There a little girl was sick, and the old man had prayed over her and advised the mother to throw away certain bottles of patent medicine she was giving. No, he had thanked them, but he wouldn't stay for supper. Maybe he could tarry when he came by again. He was pushing on to a neighbor's before dark; then, the following morning, he'd turn west and peddle among the folks who lived on Salt Lick Creek.

That was three days ago.

Clint himself turned westward, narrowing the distance between his and Dave Arnett's field of investigation. The sun beat hotly on the rutted roads, no breeze stirred even on the highest ridges and the cloudless sky was the color of polished copper. But Sheriff Hawkins could not spare his lathered horse. There were yet many miles to be covered.

By midafternoon he reached the hillside

farm where Uncle Johnny had stopped the night before last. It was on the edge of the knobs, a region thinly inhabited and most of whose people, scourings from both the lowlands and the mountains proper, were mental degenerates. From there the colporter had started southwestward, in the general direction of where his body was found.

The sheriff went no farther, but struck through the hills toward the cabin at the forks. He must not trail too closely or the murderer would get wind of him and flee the county. If Dave Arnett had done his full duty, with the results that Clint anticipated, the house of Uncle Johnny's death would be one of five within a section some three miles square.

"Narry a soul in them parts had seen the ole feller this year," reported the grizzled deputy, when he met his chief at the cabin shortly before sunset. "Several had heerd o' him bein' in the county, but nobody t'other side o' Slate Fork could tell more than that. I 'low they were speakin' the truth, Clint, too."

GEORGE DUFF, the undertaker, had put Uncle Johnny's remains in a handmade pine box, painted black, and placed the rude coffin on two small logs before the fireplace. No one but the undertaker and his assistant had come near the cabin, Andy said, although many persons had passed along the roads during the day. The murder was still an official secret.

Clint Hawkins, standing just inside the door with his two deputies, glanced upward at the sky. Thunderheads were gathering beyond the western knobs, and the air was motionless and stiffling.

"There'll be a right smart storm by midnight," he predicted, "and that wont hurt my plan a bit."

He pushed back his gray slouch hat and wiped his forehead with a red bandana.

"Dave," he said, turning to the deputy, "I know you and your horse are purty well wore out, but I've got another job for you now. I want you to get me a posse of seven men," he continued. "Sam Tabor, Mitch Robertson, Gus and Reuben Skaggs, Bud Kash, and Elcaney Smith and his brother Tom.

"Don't take any excuses for a single feller of 'em not serving. Tell 'em they'll be away from home all night, but not a word more. Let 'em fetch a blanket apiece, if they want to, and a snack of victuals. Pick 'em up one at a time, keep 'em together and bring 'em right here to me."

Both Dave and Andy looked at the sheriff in surprize.

"Hit 'pears to me," commented young Spurlock, dryly, "that ye've more deputies now than ye have outlaws to ketch. Yo' and Dave been a-beatin' the bresh all day, and we aint any nearer to findin' who kilt Uncle Johnny than when we started."

Clint twisted the tips of his long mustache and lifted his eyebrows archly.

"We've found several hundred who didn't kill him," he replied, "and that's getting close to learning who did. You don't figger on catching all the vermints in the country when you set a trap that'll just hold one."

Dave Arnett began to understand.

"Yo' mean ye're aimin' fer the colporter to pick out his own murderer?" he asked, glancing sidewise at the covered casket.

The sheriff nodded.

"Ex-actly," he said. "Ask each of them seven fellers p'intblank if he's guilty, and of course they'll all deny it. You can't count on questioning to get the truth. A murderer is naturally a master liar.

"Howsomever—" he winked a cunning eye—"it's one thing to kill a man and leave his corpse, but another to have to stay in the same room with that corpse during a dark stormy night. It's my idea that nobody who's a-tall human can do that without breaking."

Deputy Arnett chuckled his appreciation of the scheme and immediately started for his horse.

"Borrow a couple of lanterns on your way," Clint called after him. "I haven't nothing but one of them new-fangled flashlights and I'll need it myself."

"Andy," he resumed a moment later, taking the bundle of search warrants from his pocket, "now's your time to prowl. Wait an hour, then start for the houses where them seven men live. They'll each be gone with Dave when you reach their homes; so you won't have nobody to contrary you but women and children. Treat them kindly—but don't let anything stop you from searching every room from floor to ceiling and wall to wall.

"Somewhere," he added confidently, "are them split-toed brown shoes, and maybe a bloody bedtick and sheet. I'm counting on you, Andy, to find out what, in spite of my plan, we mightn't learn here tonight. Circumstantial evidence is better than none, if the guilty feller wont betray himself with talk."

"I'll find what all thar is to find," vowed Andy, putting the warrants into his pocket. And Clint Hawkins knew that he would.

LEFT alone in the cabin, an hour later he began to make certain arrangements for the night's drama. He first climbed to the loft and loosened one of the middle floor boards. By slipping the board aside, a watcher in the loft would have an undetected view of the entire room below. He then descended and removed the lid from the casket, exposing the body its full length. No one could be in the room, unless he pointedly faced the wall, without having the grim figure constantly before his eyes.

"This may be sorta dishonoring the dead," Clint soliloquized, "but I've got to do it. An officer of the law can't always heed good manners when he's out to trap a criminal."

Ominous black clouds, piling up from the west, had blanketed the sky, emitting zigzag flashes of lightning and rumbling thunder, when Deputy Arnett returned to the cabin with his posse. It was after ten o'clock. The sheriff counted only five men as he greeted them at the door. Elcaney and Tom Smith, whose families lived together, were not among them.

"They moved to Ohio last month," Dave told Clint in an undertone. "I'm shore of that, 'cause their house is empty and every separate person I saw 'lowed they was gone."

Before taking the lighted lanterns into the room, where the five possemen were standing uncertainly in the darkness, Clint Hawkins gave his deputy lengthy instructions. He had unlimited confidence in Dave Arnett's cunning and prowess. Dave, when a boy, ran away from home and spent his youth fighting Apaches in the Southwest, and since, for more than a score of years, had hunted lawless Kentuckians in his native hills.

"That lanky Arnett can kill his weight in man meat any time he pulls a trigger," the sheriff once boasted of him. "No bullets are ever wasted that shoot through his gun."

There was a moment of tense silence when Clint set both lighted lanterns on the table at the foot of John Bradshaw's coffin. The five men, seeing the interior of the cabin for the first time, instinctively drew close together, gaping. Most of them shakily removed their hats.

Fat Sam Tabor swore.

"——, Clint, I didn't know we were comin' to a funeral meetin'!" he ejaculated.

"Hit's Uncle Johnny Bradshaw 'r I'm a liar!" gasped Mitch Robertson, a lean, sharp-featured farmer.

Young Bud Kash said nothing, but paled and licked his lips, staring down at the blood-stained shirtbosom.

Gus Skaggs laughed shortly and fumbled a plug of tobacco from his overalls pocket.

"Boys, I reckon the high sheriff takes us fer bloodhounds," he drawled. " 'Pears to me that they're what's needed most round here."

"Yas," growled old Reuben, his father; "I'd as lief a dawg would have my place. I 'lowed to make up some sleep tonight."

Dave Arnett closed and bolted the door, placed a chair against it and seated himself there solidly. Clint, standing by the table, waved toward the other two chairs, the bench and bed.

"You fellers make yourselves comfortable," he invited. "Sit around, swap yarns, or pile up in your blankets and go to sleep. We're apt to be here all night, with nothing particular to do, the only rule being that nary a one of us can go outside.

"I want you to understand that," he said firmly, repeating, "nobody leaves this cabin on any account. I'm your boss now and them's my orders."

There was some grumbling.

"But, Clint, what's all this about?" demanded Mitch Robertson. "A posse ain't got no consarn with a dead man."

Sheriff Hawkins looked sharply from one to the other.

"It's a live man this posse's concerned with," he answered. "You'll know who he is by morning.

"Of course," he added, "every one of you are good, law-abiding citizens. That's why I had Dave swear you in to help me. But there's some feller in these hills who's a plumb disgrace to the county. He kilt a stranger that he'd took in as a guest and robbed him of his money. There ain't a man of us here who won't say he oughtn't to be caught and punished severe."

Sam Tabor slowly shook his head.

"Money's pow'ful temptin' stuff to a heap o' folks," he muttered.

"Why—why—" stammered Bud Kash, speaking for the first time. "Uncle Johnny took dinner at my house jest yisterday. He left ag'in three o'clock, seemin' pert and well as ye please."

The other three men made no comment. Mitch sprawled himself in a chair, and Reuben and Gus Skaggs took the bench.

Clint explained only what was obvious about Uncle Johnny's death.

"Now," he concluded, "I'm going up in the loft and sleep. I've put in a hard day and I want to be in shape to lead you boys tomorrow. Dave'll take my place down here."

He blew out one of the lanterns, smiled a good night to the men and ascended the ladder.

IN THE loft he stretched himself noisily on the floor, but with his face near the loosened board. He took out his electric flash and revolver, and laid both within easy reach of his right hand. Then, his eyes to the hole in the floor, he began his vigil.

The six men in the dimly-lighted room below discussed the crime for more than an hour, talking in undertones. Dave Arnett, of course, said little and answered few questions. The others freely exchanged surmises and theories, recalling similar killings they had known and making many wild conjectures.

Bud Kash took the third chair and moved it to a corner farthest from the coffin. Sam Tabor shortly wrapped himself in the blanket he had brought and laid down on the bed. The Skaggses were seated almost alongside the black box, stolidly chewing tobacco and spitting on the earthen floor. Mitch Robertson's long legs were restless. He crossed and uncrossed them frequently, looking at John Bradshaw's peaceful face, then glancing away, then looking again. The deputy sat with his arms folded, his chair hitched back against the door. Clint saw, however, that his keen eyes were busy, missing no movement made by the others.

Outside rain began to fall, at first gently, then, driven by a rising wind, in a hard and gusty downpour. The lightning flashes were almost continuous and a steady cannonade of thunder resounded among the hills. Above the natural clamor a hound, somewhere in the distance, sent its lonely howl through the storm-convulsed night.

"No man can sleep in the same room with the corpse of a feller he's stabbed," thought Clint, flat on his stomach, peering down at the fat trader. "Sam Tabor loves money, but that or nothing else is keeping him awake now."

Young Bud Kash still showed the most uneasiness. But, to the sheriff's knowledge, he never had done anything worse in his life than marry a fourteen-year-old girl, two Summers before, and by her father a child each succeeding Spring. His criminal record in the county was clear. Nevertheless, there were other facts that had to be taken into account. Bud was shiftless and miserably poor, and he admitted that the colporter had stopped at his house the noon before the tragedy.

If it was true that John Bradshaw had gone on from there, and Sam Tabor was innocent, he must have put up for the night with Mitch Robertson or the Skaggses. There was no one living at the Smith cabin, Dave Arnett had ascertained.

"Reuben and Gus have an alibi," continued Clint, remembering his conversation with them that morning. He had repeated it and the remarks he exchanged with the trader to his deputies. "Them Skaggses live alone, Reuben being a widower; and while I wouldn't put nothing past 'em, they were over with Jeb Fraley last night. Now Mitch——"

His first wife had died suddenly and mysteriously, the sheriff recalled, and directly afterward Robertson married a slattern from the Hinkston slums. He had been indicted more than once for dynamiting fishing streams and was a notoriously steady customer of the moonshining Skaggses. Clint Hawkins half believed that in him he had his man.

It was now after midnight. A querulous voice came from a corner below—

"Dave, I can't see what good I'm a-doin' here." A crash of thunder punctuated the sentence. "I—I got a woman and two young'uns, Dave, and this is a turrable storm. Won't ye let me go home to them and come back in the mornin'?"

"Yo' heerd what the sheriff said," replied the deputy, tartly. "Nobody leaves this house, Bud, onless he fust climbs over me 'n' my six shooter."

"I agrees with Bud," grumbled the bearded Reuben on the bench. "Thar hain't no law ner sense in keepin' a body from his bed jest to wait on a dead corpse. I got a lot o' work to do tomorrow, myself."

"Aw, shet up, Pap!" snapped his son. "Mitch, let's yo' and me have a leetle game o' mumblepeg."

Mitch hesitated, then agreed; but selected a space of floor well away from the fireplace. Sam Tabor, on the bed, was snoring loudly. The lantern flame, fanned by the wind which snarled between the unchinked logs, sent eery shadows crawling over the walls and ceiling. The hound had ceased to howl, but the storm showed no lessening of violence.

Old Reuben got up, paced the room a few times, then, grunting, stretched himself on the bench.

Clint, dampened by rain beating through the leaky roof, pondered the scene below with rising doubt. After all, it was natural that ignorant men, steeped in medieval superstition, should act strangely in the presence of stark death.

Bud Kash, hunched up on his chair and nibbling his finger nails, indicated nothing but primitive fear. Mitch's conscience might be reminding him of past sins, but he was playing a good game of mumblepeg. Even the complaining Reuben had quieted and was asleep.

The sheriff began to question his own theories. His plan might frighten the five suspects to the brink of panic, but it could not wring a confession from the innocent. And nothing short of a confession or a telltale remark would lead him any closer to his prey than he already was. Uncle Johnny could have been stabbed while he was spending the night camped out in the woods; or his body might have been carried farther than Clint reckoned; or somebody might have lied to him or Dave Arnett that day. Anyhow, Sheriff Hawkins now admitted to himself, his most important deductions very possibly were wrong.

"If Andy don't find anything," he muttered, "I'm p'intedly up against it. I won't know which way to turn or what to do next for evidence. Likewise, if morning comes and nothing has happened, I'll have a lot of explaining to do to them men downstairs. They'll 'low I'm a plumb fool and orate it all over the county."

Clint's great body was stiff from lying in one position and he was feeling the strain of the last twenty hours. Weariness began to numb his senses. He struggled to keep awake. But, he asked himself, what was the use? He was learning nothing of real legal value. With the slow passing of another hour, he dozed.

His subconscious instincts, however, did not let him sleep long. Within sixty minutes he aroused. The storm had subsided, rolling toward the east. There now was only an occasional mutter of thunder, otherwise dark and heavy silence.

Beneath him Dave Arnett was speaking curtly:

"I'm tellin' yo' fer the last time, thar ain't no use in yo' boys gittin' restless. Mitch, I'm not goin' to answer any more questions, neither."

Clint looked through the peep-hole. Mitch Robertson was standing beside the coffin, bareheaded, gazing intently at the lifeless form, his thin shoulders stooped. Bud Kash had turned his chair around and was facing the blank wall, his back to the others. Gus slouched against the window sill near his sleeping father, across the room opposite the deputy. Some one had lighted the second lantern on the table, the other apparently having burned out.

"Dave, what air we waitin' here fer anyway?" inquired Gus, petulantly.

The deputy's instructions covered such a question at this time.

"Wal," he drawled, "one thing we're waitin' fer is Andy Spurlock. He's gone to fetch us a pair o' brown shoes, cut acrosst the toes."

The remark had no noticeable effect, although Clint could not see the men's expressions plainly.

After a moment Dave went on:

"Uncle Johnny was knifed while he was undressed and in bed. But whoever put his clothes back on him atter that was in sech a hurry he fergot his shoes. Andy went to find 'em. O' course," he added, "we can't let the colporter be buried in his sock feet."

Bud swung around in his chair.

"I recollect them shoes!" he exclaimed. "I seen 'em on Uncle Johnny whilst he was at my house that day!"

Gus Skaggs glanced behind him out the open window, which faced the east. Mitch continued to stare down at the coffin, as if he had not heard.

"Did all yo' boys fetch yer guns?" asked Dave, unfolding his arms and resting his hands on his hips.

"I have only a squirrel rifle," answered Bud, "and ye tole me not to bring hit."

Gus patted his left breast.

"Me 'n' Pap's got ours," he said. "So has Mitch thar. But Sam he never owned a weepon in his life. Too stingy to buy one, I reckon."

He chuckled sarcastically.

"Yit that Tabor shore kin use a knife," he declared. "At hawg-killin' time he's the best man I know. Sam kin stick a sow to the heart afore she has a chancet even to squeal!"

Clint Hawkins swore almost audibly. And here he had believed the trader was innocent, absolutely above suspicion after the night's developments. Yet Sam had seemed mighty curious that morning on the road. He was the first abroad near the forks and wanted to know what had "happened" where the sheriff came from.

Clint now was certain of nothing. His conclusions were in a panic. But Andy should be back within the next hour. That was his last hope. Sheriff Hawkins was discouraged and becoming impatient.

"Yo' don't need Pap and me both here," complained Gus Skaggs, after several minutes silence in the room. "Dave, supposin' ye let me go home jest long enough to feed the chickens and do the milkin'. Then I'll come right back, I swear I will."

Dave Arnett stubbornly shook his head, but said nothing.

"I didn't bring no victuals," whined Bud, squirming in his chair, "and I'm a-gittin' hungry."

"Here," promptly spoke up Mitch, reaching into his coat pocket. "Ye kin have my snack. I feel like I won't never want to eat ag'in."

Reuben stirred on the bench, grunting in his sleep. Mitch Robertson looked at him, then at Sam, sighed enviously and turned his back on the coffin.

"I shore am glad this night's about over," he muttered. "Hit's made me see sights I ain't thought on in many a year. Good Gosh!"

And he sank limply into his chair.

Dawn would soon be breaking, Clint knew, and still the lifeless figure of John Bradshaw had wrung no confession from any one of the five men. It was useless to continue the test longer. Even if Sam was a skilled knifer, that was not evidence enough on which to hold him.

Sheriff Hawkins lifted himself on his elbow, determined to go down, explain his folly to the posse and dismiss them.

THEN, suddenly, his eyes were drawn again to the hole. There was a scream below and a human body thudded heavily to the floor. It was Reuben Skaggs.

"Have a bad dream?" grinned Dave, while Gus grabbed his father by the arm and roughly jerked him back on the bench.

There the old man sat blinking and trembling.

"Reuben Skaggs—" Deputy Arnett leaned forward, his grin hardened to piercing scrutiny—"whar was yo' last night? Tell me, *quick!*"

"I—I—we——" stammered the moonshiner, rubbing his eyes with his fists.

"Jeb Fraley was in town that night," blazed Dave, lying. "Yo' and Gus weren't with him 'r nowhars near his still. Then whar was ye hidin' out—atter yo' all left Uncle Johnny's corpse at the forks yonder?"

Gus Skaggs stiffened against the wall, his features colorless.

"Hit aint so!" he shouted furiously. "—— yo', Dave Arnett, we'uns didn't do hit! Pap—*wake up!*"

Old Reuben was awake, awake and alert, and Clint saw a wicked leer twist his bearded lips. At the same instant his hand crept to his shirt bosom and Gus's right foot lunged toward the table.

"*Stop!*"

But Sheriff Hawkins' bellowed command was drowned in sudden darkness below, the darkness shivered by two pistol flashes—then a third—then two more. There was a hoarse curse, a groan. Something bulky and soft struck the earthern floor. Bud Kash yelled. Outside, from the road, sounded a familiar hallo, Andy's voice. Then silence and darkness again.

Clint, the flashlight in one hand, his revolver in the other, stumbled down the ladder, facing the room as he descended. He snapped on the electricity in the torch and focused it about the room.

Bud cowered in the corner behind his chair. Mitch sat open-mouthed and gasping with terror. On the edge of the bed was fat Sam Tabor, swathed in his blanket, his arms lifted above his head in surrender. Across the black pine box sprawled Reuben Skaggs, the evil leer fixed on his face by death. Half-way to the door, beside the overturned table, lay Gus, a pistol clutched in his fingers, a widening red stain about his heart.

Dave Arnett stood with his back against the door, straight and stolid as a sentinel. His bronzed features were calm and his arms were folded across his breast, but he still held his revolver, ready.

Clint regarded him with bitter reproach.

"Dave, I'm afraid you acted too hasty," he sighed, shaking his head. "Reuben and Gus were only scared and wanted to get out of here. I don't much blame 'em. With all my plans and scheming, I ain't proved nothing on them or nobody else. I've just made you commit murder, that's what I've done."

He sighed again, his thick shoulders drooping.

The deputy was unmoved. He nodded toward the Skaggses.

"They'd drawed their guns," he affirmed, "and started at me a-shootin'. Yo' er no yo', Clint, I had a right under the law to kill in self-defense."

The door behind him shook from some outside pressure and Dave opened it. Andy Spurlock, drenched and grimed with mud, stepped into the room. Under one arm he carried a bundle wrapped in a partly burned quilt.

Sheriff Hawkins, turning the electric torch about the room, briefly explained to him what had happened.

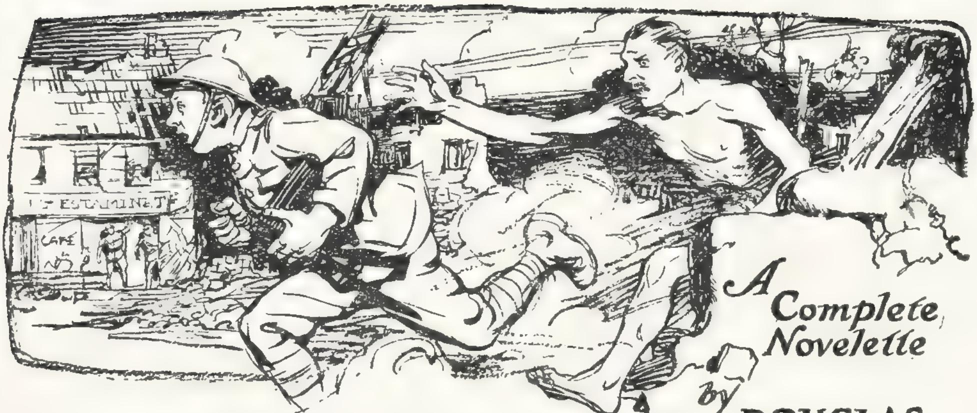
THROUGH the window the men could see the faint light of another day rimming the eastern hills. The sky had cleared and an early robin was warbling in the thicket behind the cabin.

Andy undid the bundle and took from it a pair of brown shoes, split across the toes, and a large kitchen knife.

"Yo' got the right men, Dave," he said. "I found this quilt a-smolderin' in the Skaggses' fireplace and the shoes stuck under the bed whar hit come from. In the kitchen was this knife, the blade washed clean, but, if ye'll look sharp, thar's somethin' mighty like blood close up ag'in the hilt."

He handed the evidence to the sheriff.

"Yas, Clint," he added, grinning, "I 'low I'll be yore deputy so long as yo'll let me. I like the temper o' yer mind. And Dave here, keep him too. His trigger-finger shore saved this State a considerable expense."



A Complete Novelette by

TUB TOBIN REPEATS

DOUGLAS OLIVER

Author of "To 'Bugs'— and Butterflies," "Queer Fish," etc.

IT WAS the closing day of the umpteenth or so course at the Masnières Musketry School.

It was a beastly hot and sleepy day, too, and Private Tub Tobin, down the previous week from Cow Alley and the chalk pit—a country where strenuous times permitted little play for imagination—was casting longing eyes down the road at a white-walled *estaminet* wherein credit was good and the beer better.

"An' another little drink wouldn' do us any harm," whistled Tobin between smacks of his lips.

"Y'er right," said the class non-com instructor who, too, was a lead swinger when opportunity offered. He lolled in the soft grass at Tobin's side. Clawing at his collar hooks where they bit into his parched throat, he exclaimed—

"——! I'm dry as the desert."

"What say, then?" asked Tobin in a stage whisper.

The non-com instructor raised on his elbow and squinted down the ribbon of road, bare as a billiard ball from the *estaminet* on to where it crept over the hill, a half mile distant.

"Dunno," registered one side of the non-com's judgment.

"Aw, gwan," pleaded the other side.

Tub Tobin hung eagerly on the non-com's decision. A broad smile swept to his face. Fishing in his belt he brought up some filthy paper money.

"Stuff to give 'em," he said and waved the notes provocatively in front of his superior.

The latter took another squint down the ribbon of road. No traffic. Not a thing visible. The squint seemed to provide the missing link of assurance for he wheeled round, saying:

"*Allez*, then. Shake those feet of yours. 'Cause if you ain't back by the time the brass hats arrive—you an' me for the fireworks. An' believe me, boy, old Birdseed knows how to touch 'em off."

Old Birdseed, it needs must be explained at this juncture, was a Canadian brigadier who boasted he could outshoot any man in his command and who everlastingly talked—the brigade called it a pipe dream—of a school of his own establishing where marksmanship could be developed to a stage of perfection hitherto undreamed of. On this theme he preached monotonously, early and late, and won for himself the reputation of being a twin track thinker, the spotlight of whose favor was but rarely turned, and then only upon those wise enough to assail him along his two lines of least resistance.

Private Tub Tobin contributed another broad smile as he sensed the non-com's anxiety.

"Trus' me, sarge," he declared. "I'll put it over."

"Make it snappy then," said the non-com.

"*Merci, merci*," purred Tobin after the manner of a street gamin. "You may kiss me, sergeant."

The non-com, instead, aimed a kick

which fell short of its intended destination. Tub Tobin, who had leaped lightly aside, hustled over to the firing mound, and there, with utter disregard for his musketry manual's innumerable "Dont's", dropped his rifle *kerplunk* in the sand.

"Hey, you," remonstrated the non-com.

"Hay for yourself, you big mule," came Tobin's retort.

Tub streaked it for the white walls on which his eyes had been feasting all afternoon. Half way to the road he bumped into two chaps lugging up fresh ammunition for the firing practises. To one of the pair he whispered—

"You're on 'twenty,' ain't you, Mac?"

The fellow nodded.

"That's my number," said Tobin, drawing closer. "An' you know I can't hit the broad side of a barn. Get me? It's up to you—see?"

The ammunition carrier drew back.

"Nothing doing," he said, half indignantly, for he had divined what Tobin was driving at.

"Suit y' erself," snapped Tub, bringing his hand away from his belt.

"Get the color of that?" he asked, offering a handful of franc bills for inspection. He gave the other chap no chance to reply but sing-songed on: "Yours for the trouble, Mac. An' double it, if my red-dog luck's up to snuff tonight."

"You want?" This came after some hesitation.

"Jus' this. Make 'em all saucer-busters, every —— shot that's fired on your target. See? This old Birdseed is a peculiar guy. I'm wised to what he's cracked on an' I'm takin' no chances."

Tobin wrung the target tender's hand and moved on.

"Ain't it the —— how money gets 'em," he mused as he crawled through the hedge and headed for his port of desire.

Back on the firing mound, the non-com instructor was in a state of nervous collapse. Ten, twenty, thirty, forty minutes had passed, and the door of the *estaminet* through which that tough, Tobin, had passed had not reopened.

"You'd think they was makin' that beer," he fussed. The beer, however, wasn't his chief cause for worry. A short while back, a bugle call—badly blown—had winged up from beyond the hill where a quarter-guard was stationed.

"The guy that tooted that horn," debated the non-com, "had a frog in his throat. Somethin' was worryin' him. I'll bet it was Birdseed.

"Holy smoke! Here he comes."

From over the distant hill there sped toward Masnières a long lean car, pennon fluttering from the radiator cap.

The non-com instructor threw a last despairing glance at the *estaminet* door. Then tightening his belt and switching his cap from its rakish to a more suitable angle he let loose.

"On your feet, you dubs. Fall in. Shun! In twos—number. Ash'aware. In twos—number. For ——'s sake stiffen up, there. Hey, there, you fat ass, swallow that chew. Pick up that gun, you wooden head. Open ranks, mar-r-r-cha. Ash'aware. Open ranks, mar-r-r-cha!"

THE five-hundred yard range of the Masnières Musketry school was a busy beehive when the long lean car, with its burden of brass hats, hummed in. Old Birdseed's blue eyes took in things at a glance. Before him stretched a line of keen candidates—no lead swingers, there, by thunder!—firing with that clock-like precision so manifested by the British old guard in the retreat from Mons. Signal discs of varied colors waved jerkily in synchronism. Register keepers, coolly calculative, droned behind the line of marksmen.

"Pr-r-r-vate Smith—the thir-r-d shot on the score—a miss."

"Bah!" ejaculated old Birdseed.

His school, if he had one, wouldn't tolerate misses. He strode forward, spurs jangling. The non-com instructor kept his eyes "front" till he heard the brigadier's "bah!" Then he jumped like a flivver going into reverse, and saluted with a flourish.

"Yes, sir?" he enquired.

Old Birdseed wanted the floor and he expressed himself accordingly.

The non-com took on a new lease of life, inflated his lungs, and let go like thunder—

"Cease fire-a! Un-de-load-a! Rest-a!"

Again he wheeled about, repeating his hand-waving.

Old Birdseed returned the compliment with an idle flip of his riding crop. Running a critical eye the length of the firing squad he tersely remarked—

"Man missing."

"After ammunition, sir," said the non-com driven to prevarication.

"Who's the missing man?" demanded old Birdseed.

The non-com instructor looked at the school C. O., who had dashed up at that moment. The school C. O. looked blank.

"The man's name—I insist," raged old Birdseed.

The non-com spoke up:

"Private Tobin, sir. Of the *n*th battalion, sir. A headquarters scout and sniper, sir."

"Ah?" Old Birdseed's ears had pricked up.

"A sniper, you say? Interesting. A crack shot, I presume. Splendid! Here—Jamieson."

Jamieson, a dashing young galloper in pale puttees and flaring breeches, sprang forward and assisted the old man in divesting himself of Sam Browne and tunic. He even went so far as to roll up the Brigadier's sleeves for him.

"Nicely, Jamieson," purred old Birdseed contentedly. "Now, bring me a rifle."

The group of spectators looked on as the brigadier peered approvingly down the barrel of the Enfield.

"Takes me back," he enthused, "to the old Bisley days when I was runner-up for the Queen's."

More peering and bolt-working.

"Two clips, Jamieson."

The cartridges were turned over.

"Now," said old Birdseed, chuckling to himself, "we'll wait for this sniper fellow. It will be a pleasure for me to match my skill against his and—beat him."

They hadn't long to wait. Down at the road, at the *estaminet*, a door slammed harshly. Tub Tobin was outside again—thrown out apparently, for the group on the firing mound saw him pick himself up from the dust, shake himself like a St. Bernard, get his bearings and stumble their way.

He came like the frog of the "frog and well" problem—falling back a step for every two he took. Eventually he dragged himself up, singing—

"Every little girl can teach me somethin' new."

"I see," said young Jamieson, who would have his thrust, "that the ammunition cart is up—and loaded, too. Shall I put the 'binge' under arrest, general?"

" 'Binge'?" questioned Tobin. "I ain't no such animal."

"Silence!" thundered old Birdseed. "Sit down, fellow."

Tobin sat down hard, trying to clear the fog from his vision. Whew! That had been some 'stick' that dame had stuck in his beer.

Old Birdseed was saying:

"This chap is entitled to some consideration, Jamieson. If he's the man I think him to be."

Wherewith he told the story of a man who'd taken more rum than was good for him one winter morning and had gone over and clouted a German post in front of Avion, bringing back identification badly wanted at the time.

Now, Tub Tobin had never been on the Avion front in his life, but when Jamieson's polished boot dug him in the ribs and that swanker asked: "Are you the same chap?" his lips fashioned a "Yesshir." Growing bolder, he added—

"Yesshir! Shot four hunsh—in four shotsh."

"Ah?" old Birdseed interposed. "Good shooting, my man." Aside, he said: "You never can tell, gentlemen, from appearances, just how clever a man is."

Tub Tobin, goggle-eyed, knees knocking, arose. He looked a wreck. He looked as though Cow Alley and the chalk pit weren't the only places where a war was on. Deliberately—quite impertinently he winked at young Jamieson who threw a fit and appealed to the brigadier.

"But, general," he said, "you're not going to stand for such insolence, are you?"

Old Birdseed replied:

"Why, he's not worrying me any. We'll see just how 'binged' he is."

Confusedly, Tub Tobin drank in the brigadier's challenge—

"Ten shots at five hundred—and may the best man win."

"An' the besh man will win," grinned Tobin. " 'Cause I'm the besh man."

"That remains to be seen," contradicted old Birdseed, flopping on his tummy.

Legs angled off, he took innumerable sighting pots at imaginary heinies in the valley bottom. Then he shot a cartridge into the chamber of his rifle and got down to serious business, humping himself up like a speared frog with every pull of the trigger. But his sight was still keen and his breathing steady and he ran off a possible in his old Bisley way.

To this day men talk of the wonder-work of Private Tub Tobin at Masnières. It would be folly to attempt description of the divers shapes into which Tub got his limbs at each shot. One thing certain is that old Birdseed and his retinue never saw anything of the like before.

The old man's face turned an apoplectic purple as he saw his unbeatable score being equaled—and in a way, moreover, that left no doubt as to the identity of the more brilliant performer. Tub Tobin actually stopped short of standing on his head to fire but the positions he did assume nevertheless established precedent for every musketry manual under the sun.

"*Crack!*" Tobin's rifle would bark.

"Bull's eye," the register-keeper would drone.

"Ah!" old Birdseed would breathe from back of his purple.

As the signal disc on Target 20 waved on Tobin's final shot, old Birdseed started to preach.

"In my new school, gentlemen——"

"You shaid it shir!" This interruption from Tobin on whom the hot sun was getting in its work.

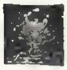
Old Birdseed eyed Tobin closely. Finally he said:

"You've got nerve, my boy, and I've been trimmed—for the first time in my life. You've put it over. But, boy, the next time we meet, and I'm sure we shall meet again, I'll turn the tables. You won't repeat next time. For the present, good-by, gentlemen."

"Toodaloo," Tub Tobin called affectionately, but the brigadier was out of ear-shot, striding back to the humming Sunbeam.

"Holy smoke!" said the amazed non-com instructor as the brass hats whirred away, "I never dreamed you had it in you, Tobin."

"Thassho?" leered Tub from the bed of grass on which he'd suddenly wilted, "Whash you think I done with the beer—leave it back there at the *shtaminay?*"



TUB TOBIN'S past experience with trains had taught him that all the slow ones weren't routed through Arkansas.

The one dragging him from Masnières up to the line, was even more tortoise-like than the average French crawler. Early that morning he had bundled himself into the dilapidated compartment. In the dirty seats, broken woodwork and shattered glass he had read an uncomfortable trip up country which he was now experiencing.

Tobin's disgust had run the length of the multiplication table several times. Curled up on one of the chairs from which dust puffed at every twist of his chilled body he vainly attempted to get some sleep. Nothing doing! Gusts of rain swept in through the broken windows to add to his misery. Up ahead in the darkness the tortoise grunted and tooted and tooted and grunted, striving as best it knew how to get somewhere, but to Tobin's prejudiced thinking never making any headway.

"*Brrrrh!*" came from Tub's lips as he opened his eyes for the fortieth time in the last kilo. "*Brrrh!* Wonder how far it is to Neuville St. Vaast? Will I ever get there?"

Neuville St. Vaast, the R. T. O. had told him, was where he might expect to locate his unit.

"Great Peter!" Tobin went on, "I could make better time walkin' an' for two bits I'd *parti* this junkheap."

The train carriage rocked violently, seemed to stand on end, then came down with a bump that sprawled its occupant on the floor, equipment about his ears. It was evident that the braking end of the tooter and grunter worked satisfactorily if the steam part didn't.

"To —— with it," fumed Tobin, and dived for his harness like a thirsty steer heading for water.

He slung his rifle and kicked open the carriage door. It was inky black but after considerable eye straining he made out a faint glimmer not so far off. Lamps! Lamps meant a town of some size and a town meant a road and a chance for a lift with up-bound traffic.

The kilo and a half of Tub's judging lengthened into three of sweating and swearing before he pulled himself over a tall fence and dropped onto a cobbled road.

"Hooray!" he yelled, for he was just in time.

Rumbling toward him was a big lorry with dazzling lights. Tobin dashed out into the street.

"Stop!" he bawled, but his appeal was drowned in the roar of the truck's exhaust.

Slop picked up by the heavy wheels sprayed him up and down. He was left with a bad taste.

"Skunks," he raged between dabs with an old handkerchief. "The pups! Watch me nail the next one."

He backed to the shadow of the fence and waited the approach of a second lorry. It did not come. Waiting grew tiresome. Legs cramped. The drizzle had not let up. Vigilance wavered. Down the street a window glowed.

"Better than the rain," said Tobin and he pulled away to the glow. Delight kindled within him as he saw C-A-F-É lettered on the glass.

The second lorry came. It came with a roll of thunder over the village street. From a café door something bounced out as though propelled by springs. The something was Tobin, who planted himself squarely in the path of the oncoming truck, brought his rifle to his shoulder and lined the sights on nothing in particular. Tobin's grip was unsteady and the barrel of his Enfield jiggled but the truck driver understood just the same and he brought his charge to a grinding stop.

"Wot's up?" boomed a voice, suspiciously Australian, from the lorry's cab.

Tub Tobin delayed reply until he'd scrambled over the tailboard.

"Wanna lift. Thashall," he said rather thickly.

From a second Aussie throat issued a peremptory demand that he make himself scarce. Aside—

"A —— Canajun back there, digger. Shall I chuck the blighter out?"

Now, Tub Tobin didn't relish any chucking. Although he had little use for Aussies in general he was quite content under the circumstances to accept whatever hospitality they had to offer. For the way was rough and the going tough and he just had to get to Neuville St. Vaast, by hook or by crook, or his crime sheet would blossom out shortly with a new entry. A. W. L. was frowned upon in his unit. So his mind reverted to his leather belt and his red dog winnings therein. Adopting a confidential tone he laid his cards on the table.

"I'll give you birdsh fifty francs to put me down at my doorstepsh."

"Good money?" enquired one of the Aussies.

"Sure thing!"

"Not enough."

"All I got. Wait!"

Tobin dug in his haversack and brought out a thin-necked bottle which he passed up for inspection.

"Coney an' cash for pass—hic hic—passhage on your ol' boat."

"Righto, Canada," drawled the lorry pilot and at once entered into the spirits of the occasion. Gurgles—more gurgles! The crash of the bottle on the road-stones, and the truck again got going.

Presently—

"Hi, there, Canada. W'ere to?"

"Noovilsavash," grunted Tobin.

"I say, where?"

"Noov—hic—Noo'vas," wheezed the passenger from the platform where he reclined, head pillowed on his box respirator.

The driver scratched his head, remarking to himself: "Hof course, I knows that place. B'low Arras."

Into the night the lorry plunged. Kilo after kilo, up hill and down hill, rolled beneath the rumbling wheels. Eastward a red glow suffused the skyline. Some dump burning! Closer, pin-point flashes of pale yellow evidenced activity of batteries. At a cross-roads a strident voice arrested their dash.

"Lamps off, there."

Lamps went dead and the going became slower. Time winged swiftly by. Nearer and nearer they drew to the front. By the wayside a great howitzer coughed deafeningly and a silver streak shot up into the heavens. Once the lorry paused momentarily for a pitch hole. Above the softened roar of the engine could be heard the thumping of guns—all around. But still Tub Tobin slept.

He awakened with a jolt. Something had banged him in the back. Startled, he felt beneath him. Sticky stuff! Hit? He'd been hit. That was his first thought. Further exploration, however, recorded no hurt. His hand brought up only slimy clay with which all French roads are smeared. He bent his ear. Back to him, sprawled there on the highway, came the sound of rumbling wheels.

Chucked out, eh? And by those dirty diggers, too! Well, he'd have to make the best of it. There was no use crying over spilled milk. Finding his feet he stumbled off the road. A pile of white brick showed through the gloom. Pawing a hole in the rubble heap he curled up in it, first spreading his groundsheet over him. Immediately he dozed off.

The sun was high when he sat up. He stretched his arms, yawned, and rubbed his eyes. Then he looked up. Two thousand feet above him, an enormous silver sausage, dragging heavily on its anchor cable, swayed in the breeze.

"That's the kind of a job I want in the next war," mused Tobin, folding his groundsheet. That accomplished he turned his attention to his surroundings. What? There was nothing familiar about this place. Something wrong! He let his eyes again wander over the scene of desolation. Doggone right the place seemed strange. He crossed over to a stub of a tree from which a signboard hung. He read:

THIS IS

NEUVILLE VITASSE

"Great Peter!" exclaimed Tub. "You'd never guess it. Changed some since last I saw it. The cryin' question is: Find the batt."

Right then he spotted the difference. He spelt the name out.

"N-e-u-v-i-l-l-e V-i-t-a-s-s-e."

A difference? You bet! A difference of only a few letters from Neuville St. Vaast where his unit was but—oh! what a difference those few letters made. In kilos and hard walking? Only the —— knew the difference.

"To —— with all Aussie bushwhackers," muttered Tobin, sliding into his harness preparatory to moving.

Way up above him where the bag of silver hung, an iron door slammed and something whistled. It was the way those balloon babies had—the slam before the whistle. Tobin who had ducked unconsciously observed the observers' basket swaying like a pendulum. The crump had been pretty close.

Tobin stepped out.

Slam— Whee-e-e-e-e-e-e-e!

Another smoke-puff near the rocking basket!

Tub Tobin accelerated. He knew that the thumb screw on these heinie rubber guns often worked loose—so he'd heard—and one could never know where the next might go. *Pas napoo* for him.

Swinging round, he collided with an apparition in faded blue—an old Frenchman whose tattered garments and cumbersome stick on which he leaned for support spelt scarescrow to Tobin's astonished eyes.

"Say, gen'ral," grinned Tobin, "where'd you pop from?"

The scarecrow waved his hands in explanation.

"Naw—naw," protested Tub. "*Pas compris. Retard—retard——*"

Slam— Whe-e-e-e-e-e-e!

Another crump! A *z-z-z-z-z* of jagged stuff about them.

Tub Tobin saw that the old Frenchman was too feeble minded to guess what had happened; took him by the elbow and steered him to the far side of a house wall where some cover from flying pig iron was to be had.

The moment they slid behind the wall the old man's lips commenced to coo.

"*Le voici, le voici, le voici,*" he repeated over and over, even jigging a little after dance fashion.

"Don't get you a-tall," said the disgusted Tobin. "What is it?" he queried in his best Sunday French.

For answer his scarecrow companion pointed toward a tower-shaped thing, apparently the top part of the building before German gunnery settled its hash, that had plopped down fairly in the center of the ruin.

"*Le voilà!* Le Petit Casino!" sang the excited Frenchman.

By degrees Tub Tobin worked the full story from the nervous lips.

'Neath the ruins of Le Petit Casino, somewhere, lay the scarecrow's proprietary earnings of happier hours when fame and fortune had tarried for him. Now fame had passed but fortune lay buried in a metal box under their feet. It was for this cache that the scarecrow had run the gauntlet of British Army surveillance, for this money that he'd come back all the weary way from Abbeville. One hundred thousand francs! And he would recover it, he told Tobin in his jerky manner. By the grace of ——

"——," he gurgled and flattened out as if he'd been knocked down by a sledge hammer.

The thumbscrew!

The rubber gun shell, this time away off mark, had slammed just over their heads. Tobin, nose bleeding, face scratched, waited till the acrid smoke had cleared, then painfully picked himself up from the clutter of brick on which he'd come down. The old Frenchman, he saw, was beyond help. Cut clean through at the waist, he had never known what hit him.

Tub Tobin moved the scarecrow's body to the roadside where some cart would take care of it eventually. Down the road he saw move a man who looked suspiciously like an M. P. He had to steer clear of that sort of fry. Let's see. How long A. W. L. was he? Not very long—but long enough to get a trimming for it. He'd better be shufflin' along. But something held him rooted to the spot. The one hundred thousand francs? That was it—and nothing to be sneered at either. Great Peter! What he couldn't do with that money. Wouldn't the gang sit up and gasp? Wouldn't they?

Back to Le Petit Casino Tub Tobin skinned. With a flat stick for a spade he commenced to dig. He dug till the sweat poured down his cheeks in rivulets. He dug in a kind of frenzy, moving slabs of stone that ordinarily would have resisted the combined efforts of two men. Now and again the balloon babies played round overhead but he wasted little concern on them.

At that moment the massed German artillery could not have swerved him from his purpose. He recollected having once read a book about having and holding. To have and to hold was his aim, too. He'd have that French treasure box, he swore, and once he had it, he'd hold it, all right, all right.

A sweep of his boot suddenly exposed a black surface which, poked with the stick, gave off a metallic ring.

"By ——," gasped Tobin, "the scarecrow was right."

Elated, he stooped down. It was then that a grating voice from the road smote his elation on the point of the chin.

"Come out 'ere," insisted the voice. "Come out 'ere."

Tobin worked quickly. A second sweep of his boot and the box was recovered. He straightened up, decided to hold his ground, thought better and climbed into view.

Advancing toward him was a bow-legged "chirper" M. P. who fired the first shot of his catechism the instant his cold eye fastened on Tub.

"Wot's yer name?

"What rigimint?

"Where from?

"Wot' yer' doin' 'ere?

"Wheres yer pypers?

"Canijun?

"Bli-me, Mag!

"Long way from 'ome, I 'opes?"

"Get it off your chest if it pains you," snarled Tobin, and lapsed into a state of stubborn silence from which the magical production by the "chirper" of glistening bracelets failed to arouse him.

An hour later he was slogging down the sloping road from Neuville Vitasse. Looking back he saw the Casino dump from a different angle. A square-faced, tumble-down shack he saw, squatting on the very edge of the battered village, standing out conspicuously, it seemed to him, as a flagrant insult to his injured feelings.

"Oh, I'll know you, all right, if I ever lay eyes on you again," he muttered, trying to take his medicine gamely. But one hundred thousand francs weren't to be picked up every day, and he found his pill of disappointment bitter to swallow.

"——" he mumbled.

"The same to you and many hof 'em," promptly returned the M. P., who was riding close on his prisoner's heels.

Tobin pounded on in silence. The M. P., a merry soul when he felt like it, hummed a ditty he had learned, probably, from some wheezy gramaphone.

"When yer a long, long w'y from 'ome."

"Aw go 'n' choke yourself," snapped Tub, fresh fuel added to his fires of discontent.

"Cawn't hoblige you, sir. At least not till I tells me story to yer rag-time Canijun harmy. An' strike me pink, Chawlie, if that 'appens to be yer nime, I 'opes yer git it in the neck. 'Bout fourteen days, I 'opes."

* * *

TO THE country below Arras they came on the twenty-first of March. Spring and heinie.

The first came, by calendar calculation, in a flood of sunshine and high visibility which rendered conditions ideal for gunnery and aeronautics—the second, by surprize, in an irresistible flood of green-gray that overran stubborn defenses and drowned out valiant opposition like so much spring wheat.

For five days, days of agonizing uncertainty, the freshet rolled back the banks of

British battling. At the end of the fifth day a few surviving chips of units had been tossed up on the old French holding line of '14. There, true to tradition, they stuck out their jaws and invited the K. O. But heinie, sorely winded, lacked the finishing punches. Meanwhile the sign was hung out. Plainly put, it read:

HELP WANTED

In seven hours' time the proud little band of a Canadian division, but recently off the Lens sector, was playing:

"We don't know where we're oing but we're on our way."

They didn't know either but they stuck doggedly to their knitting, doubling energy when from the brown column in their wake voices broke out impatiently:

"Come on, band!"

For rag-time was soothing syrup to low morale—to these marching men who'd come out of the land of slag-heaps and crassiers for a month's rest at peaceful Pendu and who, hungry for play and decent grub that rest promised, had bumped—just their abominable luck—fair and square into the S. O. S. from below Arras.

In a dusty section of fours Tub Tobin wailed incessantly. Tobin, to whom spring was godliness, had a curve ball on which most batters broke their backs and a roulette outfit on which players invariably broke their pay books. He, too, had been looking forward to peaceful Pendu and promised play. So he continued to growse till a big sergeant, farther forward, called back menacingly—

"The nex' time that stiff opens his trap, corp'ral, stick your rifle down it an' let go."

The day dragged on—and the night. To the left—they were skirting the city—feathery flame showed over Arras. Hun guns were pounding it, steadily pounding. Morning dragged in with added fatigue for these khakied foot-sloggers racing against time. On the evening of this second day Tobin's outfit staggered into the backwash of the British retirement. At a cross-roads they encountered a field-gun, horses straining on it.

"Where you going, there?" yelled a Canadian officer.

It was Stokes, scout officer and boss of Tobin's section, who'd called out.

"Back," returned a shadowy gunner.

"Well, son, you're headed the wrong way."

The gun-carriage creaked; one horse struggled forward. Stokes brought his stick down across the animal's head.

"About turn, you Woodbines," he bellowed, the gleam of his gat now visible. "Turn that gun around. We're from Ontario, we are."

"That's the stuff to give 'em," Tobin felt prompted to say.

He liked Stokes, a lovable chap. Stokes had been so decent to him that time he'd done his fourteen days field punishment.

Presently the battalion reached a railway line. A halt was called while the C. O. and officers went into conference. Maps rustled. Pocket lamps winked guardedly. Tub Tobin lay on his back, by the side of the road, and watched the sky glow-glow-glow-glow up ahead; listened to the none too distant bark of eighteen-pounders and the more muffled B-r-r-r-o-o-m of the hows. In about two shakes of a lamb's tail, he figured, the war would be on again.

It was. The first shell piled into them as they swung into the street of the village over the railway. It was only a "percy," but it made a dent in the band big enough to bury a house in. Men scattered blindly; reassembled reluctantly at the cutting commands of superiors.

"Come on, band," some stoic got out of him, but there was no answering blare of brass.

"What's this town's name?" shrilled some man.

The answer, passed from lip to lip, sped back from the head of the column.

"Agny."

"A-g-o-n-y," sneered Tub Tobin. "You named it, wise guy."

The night was one of horror—of lost platoons stumbling through old wire and fallen trench systems, of a continuous spray from heinie overhead, of heart-rending appeals from days-old-wounded Gordons sprawled in ditch-bottoms at every twist and turn.

The day dawned. It found Tub Tobin's outfit squatting in an old sunken road—the minimum in trench line protection. It found a visibly agitated Tobin at the extreme right of his batt's frontage where a white road crossed it on its upward climb to the German line. Tobin's eyes were bulging.

"Gosh!" he breathed.

Again he focussed his gaze on a battered town from whose edge a tumbled-down shack stared down at him in mutual recognition.

"Gosh!" he said. "My ol' friend, Noovil——"

"Vitasse," prompted some eavesdropper. Tobin wheeling round confronted Stokes, the scout officer.

"You called it, sir," Tobin asserted. "It's in heinie's line, ain't it?"

Stokes peered through his binoculars.

"Not supposed to be," he said, "but last night when we muddled in here I got a glimpse of a heinie gun firing from that place—I'd bet a hat on it."

"Not supposed to be?" queried Tobin, eager for information.

"No! Brigade—old Birdseed and Jamieson and that crowd, you know—say positively that the boche isn't closer than five hundred yards. However, I think they're guessing."

"More'n likely," grinned Tobin.

"I've got to set them right, Tobin."

"Is 'at so?"

"And tonight, too. I want one volunteer and I think you'll do."

"Is 'at so? Really, I'd love the job. Last night's trip in was so dull and uninterestin'."

Stokes poked Tobin in the ribs. Then his face worked.

"Talking seriously," he went on, "I'm sure brigade's wrong. All they're going by is the map the Imperials turned over to Artillery. I've seen that map—studied every contour of it an hour ago, back at the C. O.'s pill box. And I think it lies."

"The pill box?" asked Tobin, jokingly.

"No! The map—you kidder."

"Lies, how?"

"This way! It's got our front line back six hundred yards farther than we really are."

"Don't savvy."

"Neither do I—unless—unless the Gordons whom we relieved moved forward after they sent in that map and neglected to advise on their change of position."

"Cripes!" gasped Tobin, quick to grasp the significance of it all.

"Cripes! That would mean our own barrage might fall——"

"Just about where we stand now," interrupted Stokes.

"Our fellows would get it both comin' and goin'?"

"Exactly."

"Great—great Peter! Shot up by our own guns!"

Stokes was again studying the town on the hill.

"Place isn't worth much," he commented.

Tub Tobin's eyes sparkled.

"It's you that's guessin' now, Mr. Stokes." He felt like entrusting Stokes with his tale of the little Casino. Discerning his boss's bewilderment he continued: "Not much—if you consider a hundred thousand francs not much."

Stokes laughed and said:

"When did you become a real estate valuator, Tobin?"

"Never," scorned Tobin. "Safe-crackin's my side line."

"Safe-cracking?"

"Sure 'nough—and tonight while we're prowlin' for knowledge I may knock off the joint that's got all this bullion."

Stokes clapped Tobin on the shoulder. "For ——'s sake what are you talking about? What have you been drinking?"

"Not a thing! I've sworn off 'Coney' and the 'Vin' sisters. They play ——, I've found, with a guy's pronunciation."

Stokes' amazement increased.

"What you need, Tobin, is sleep. Go get it."

Pop-pop-pop-pop! A Lewis firing on their left.

Bang - bang - bang - bang! Heinie whizzbangs after the road behind them.

"—if you can," added Stokes, calmly. "You'll need a clear head, tonight, son, or you and your safe-cracking ideas may land in your own soup."

THE ghostlike fingers of an early evening mist had long since obscured the German line when Stokes and Tobin slipped out on their little job of setting brigade right.

"Keep close," cautioned the officer and he gripped Tobin's arm in fellowship.

"Betcha life," whispered Tobin.

Together they crept up the road to Neuville Vitasse, pausing once at a shrill sighing of the wind through long grass at the road's edge—again, with a mad flop, as a rabbit scurried across their path. It seemed eternity before the tumble-down shack of the ridge blurred up before them.

"So far, so good," came Stokes' cheery whisper.

For fully a quarter of an hour they lay at full length in the muck. All they could hear, save the sweep of the breeze, was their own heavy breathing which gradually lessened as second wind came to them. Their eyes became accustomed to the darkness. Now, the site of Le Petit Casino stood out sharply against the grayer sky line.

All of a sudden a battery of sixty-pounders opened up behind them. Express trains rushed and roared overhead. Stokes took advantage of the roar to wriggle to Tobin's side.

"Might as well get it over with," he whispered. "We'll go round the thing. You to the right. I'll take the other side. Be sure you don't stick me coming round."

"A'right," said Tobin, and he drew back his rifle, getting ready to spring. He was rubbing against a brick wall when his alert ears heard a cough.

"Stokes!" thought Tub.

"S'at you?" he asked in a muffled tone.

No reply.

"S'at you?" he impatiently reiterated.

This time he had his answer. Shadowy forms leaped upon him, from out of nowhere, it seemed. He lunged out desperately with his rifle. Impact! A grind. A gasp. The tallowed bayonet had gone home. Tobin side-stepped as hot breath fanned his face. Hard hands closed on his legs. A heavy object took him a glancing blow on his tin lid. He sprawled suddenly on the ground.

Sammy Stokes, scout officer, had heard the clatter in the brickpile.

"Fritzies," he guessed immediately, and went into action on high gear. He hit Tobin's assailants like a hurricane loosed. To the first *rap* from his automatic one heinie doubled up with a long-drawn "Uh!" from his thick lips. A second shot zoomed skyward—a clean miss. The third crashed into the skull of Fritzie number two, flopping that customer in a senseless heap across a machine gun whose nozzled barrel, poked through an aperture in the wall, commanded the road up which the Canadians had crawled. Stokes' gun went empty.

A split, red flare swished up twenty yards away. More heinies there, by thunder! A stick-bomb whirred through the night and landed at the back of the Casino ruin. Fine particles of brick sprayed up from the explosion. They brought trickles of blood to Stokes' face. A second flare, much closer, illumined the scene. It revealed to Stokes' eyes another hun, stooping over Tobin's huddled form. One jump carried him across the intervening space. A nicely timed kick sent the machine-gunning enemy rolling over and over. In a twinkling Stokes had gathered up Tobin's body, had jerked it to his back, and had straddled the wall.

"Wowf!"

The cylindrical stick had detonated on the brick a few yards away. Another *wowf* in the same place. Stokes went down. Tobin's body was heaved from his shoulders. Hunks of brick splattered about. Stokes, dazed but unhurt, lay motionless till the ridge resumed its normal quiet. Then cautiously he felt around him. Not a trace of his right-bower.

"—— 'em," he spat through his teeth, "they've bumped Tub off."

It was after midnight when Stokes clumped into the C. O.'s pill box. He was fighting mad and even the sight of young Jamieson from brigade, drinking with the C. O., failed to restrain his impetuosity.

"Now do you see?" he fairly screamed, having expounded his night's adventure.

"No! I do not," returned young Jamieson who, recently elevated to the office of brigade intelligence head, was inclined to logger-head with any and all presuming to question his judgment.

"——! man," raged Stokes, "Fritz is right at the edge of that smashed-up town—not a hundred yards from our line."

"I prefer to believe what our map reads. Maps don't lie."

"Oh, don't they?"

"Drop that attitude, Stokes," cut in the domineering Jamieson. "Your colonel and I have been discussing this matter. The map stands—as it is."

"Oh, ——" mumbled the conscientious Stokes, "our barrage will wet-blanket our front line."

"Forget it," advised the C. O., who up to now had not put in his oar.

Stokes moved over to a desk, sat down, and whipped out his message book. He started to write. Presently the C. O. inquired—

"What are you up to, Stokes?"

"Nothing," returned Stokes. "I'm just going over your heads, that's all, sending my report on tonight's patrol direct to old Birdseed."

Jamieson looked daggers but said nothing.

Stokes correctly interpreted those daggers. He knew the penalty for insubordination was nasty but he was thinking, couldn't help thinking of the wet blanket and what it might mean.

At daybreak, heinie "boxed" the left front company; tried, it appeared, to wipe it off the face of the earth. Shelling was awful. Fearing an attack, the kid company commander burned his papers and fired his golden rain rocket appeal for retaliation. He got it, he and his men—in the neck. Retaliation came down like the wet blanket of Stokes' misgivings full upon that sagging sunken road, where men held their heads and groaned in terror. They now got it coming and going. The road became a road no longer. Men—white-faced, haunted things—scurried for cover like rabbits and failed to find it. There was no cover left.

Back in the pill box headquarters, the C. O., crouched alongside his own latrine—for that was the sort of a C. O. he was—listened to the hammering of Canadian guns. He was deathly afraid, now, that Stokes had been right. With the sudden tumbling through the door of a disheveled runner his worst fears were verified. A piece of shrapnel, the size of a plum, stuck out of the runner's neck. He spun like a dervish and collapsed at the colonel's feet but ere the death rattle sounded from his throat he made his entreaty heard:

"For ——'s sake, sir, turn off the guns. The batt's bein' blown to——."

The C. O. went limp. Terror-stricken he sprang to the phone.

"Get out, all of you," he curtly ordered the H. Q. crowd and indicated the pill-box door. They filed out quickly. The C. O. buzzed wildly on the phone. Thank ——! The wires were up. There was no need bothering with Artillery, he realized, for the strafe was letting down. It was Jamieson he wanted.

"It's happened," he hurriedly said when connection had been established.

"What's happened?"

"What we were warned of — Stokes' warning."

"You don't say?" A long pause. "Well, we mustn't worry about it. Stokes' message to the Brigadier never reached him. Understand?"

"Yes—b-b-but."

"But what?"

"He has the duplicate of that message in his possession."

"Well—that's up to you. You'd better get it."

Yes! It was up to him, the C. O. realized. He hung up the phone. Division was sure to get wise to the mess—men would talk—and would come poking around endeavoring to fix the responsibility for the blunder on some one's shoulders. That some one, the C. O. argued to himself, had to be Stokes. It was Stokes' prescribed duty to correct mistakes in line disposition, to set things right. Stokes, if asked, would undoubtedly tell division of his warning message to brigade. But if he couldn't produce that message, either original or copy, he'd be the goat. That was it. Stokes had to be the goat.

"Precisely," remarked the C. O. to himself, and he got to his feet. "Where the —— was the fellow's equipment, anyway?"

And Stokes—well, Stokes was up front ministering to maimed men who cried like babies and shook their fists at the hazy back-country where their own guns were letting down.

* * *

BACK-COUNTRY, at the Beaurains pump-house, Sammy Stokes met up with the ghost.

Stokes had been made the goat. He had taken his divisional medicine without a whimper, had packed his belongings, and had left his unit—an undesirable. They hadn't called him that exactly but loss of his job and the fact that he was being returned to England inferred as much. He had gone back at night with the ration limbers. His eyes smarted occasionally but the smarting wasn't attributable to the dust raised by the wheels of the cart behind which he trailed. Disgrace pricks good men deeply and Sammy Stokes was no exception to the rule.

At Beaurains, the ruin in the wood, he had stopped to rest. Thirst got him. He asked several transport drivers for a drink but they were shy.

"Try that old pump-house," one counseled. "We've filled up there several times."

Stokes tried. The building was badly

battered about—the shelling of the past week was accountable—but somewhere back of its tangle of tin he caught sounds of running water. He made for it. There he met up with the ghost.

"Beat it," said the ghost.

"Tub Tobin!" exclaimed Stokes, spinning the ghost about that he might glimpse his countenance. "What in the world are you doing here? I thought you'd been knocked off. You're among the 'missing, believed dead.' Where did you come from?"

"Mum's the word, Mr. Stokes," said Tobin. Out on the road the ration carts creaked. "Who's your friends?" added Tub.

"Transport," declared Stokes with an air that let the cat out of the bag.

"What you doin' with transport?" Tobin came back. "What's wrong?"

Stokes quickly told his story: How he'd found the telltale page—his one scrap of substantiation—missing from his message book.

"Dirty work, I'll tell the world," said Tobin. "But leave it to muh," he said boastingly, "I'll straighten things up, Mr. Stokes. I'll clear you. An' I'll clear this dirty business up. See if I don't." As an afterthought: "S'pose money'd help any?"

"No! I'm afraid not."

"Don't guess now," reminded Tub.

The transport bunch was moving again. Stokes turned to go. Tub threw out an arresting hand.

"Just a minute, Mr. Stokes," he said solemnly, "I wanna thank you from the bottom of my dirty mean heart for tryin' to lug me in from that heinie town the other night. If that heinie bomb hadn't saved me the trouble I'd have asked you to drop me off your back. I was only playin' 'possum—believe it or not. You see, Mr. Stokes—" Tobin's tone suggested sheepishness—"I went over there that night to dig for money. I wasn't askin' for any scrap. An' next mornin' when I found the boche pulled his posts away back to his main defence line an' left me all alone there, I—why, I *dug* up that money—easy as pie."

"Spoofing, Tobin?"

"Cross my heart—no!" Tub patted a metallic something under his arm. "I've just got this far with the 'kale.' I figgered on sneakin' it back to some French bank for safe keepin'. What do you think, Mr. Stokes?"

"I think, Tobin, you'd better rejoin your unit at once. A lot of the old crowd's gone west this trip and they're way below strength now. They can use you nicely. I think that's the better plan—just now."

"Yes, sir," said Tobin and he watched Stokes' going till the night had swallowed him up.

Back from the road floated a cheery—

"By-by, Tub. Good luck!"

"Silver linin', Sammy," replied Tub. "Watch for it. I'm goin' to put it over."

ALL things come out in the wash.

At Wailly, back of the Neuville Vitasse sector, a kind-hearted town major, displaying unlooked for ingenuity, had dammed up a small creek, thereby creating a swimming pool in whose cool, if muddy waters mud larks were wont to disport at fashionable moments. These mud larks were poor —— infantry, and their fashionable moments were intervals between heinie's eight-inch potting at the town major's handiwork.

"Some day," Tub Tobin had once referred to the bath, "one of these *wowers* will put the butcher-shop sign on that soda fountain."

"And I hope the C. O. is there at the time," snarled another poker player. "By the way, Tubby, how're you making it with his nibs?"

"Jus' fine," grinned Tobin. "Although I don't think he trusts me farther than he can see. Says I snoop round too much. It's a wonder to me he ever took me on as batman."

Snooping was not one of Tobin's characteristics but he had Sammy Stokes' name and interests at heart, and snoop he did. Everlastingly. His snooping, however, had brought little in the way of results. True, he had once listened in on a short *parlez* between the C. O. and that snippy thing from brigade—that gump, Jamieson, who'd tried to ride him down at musketry—during which the C. O. had flared up and said something about double-crossing.

Double-crossing! Tobin had assayed that remark at length and had drawn the conclusion that it was Jamieson who was doing the double-crossing. But in what way? Tobin knew Stokes' story by heart and he was firmly of the opinion, as Stokes had been, that the C. O. was responsible for the disappearance of at least one of the messages. As for the original—could Jamieson have it? Tobin recalled that the C. O. and Jamieson had been pretty thick. Were they falling out? Thieves fell out, he knew. Could that snide Jamieson, have the all-important original? Could he be holding it over the C. O.'s head for some reason or other?

Over and over, till his head ached, Tobin argued these points. He got fed up. As a sleuth he was a joke. He dreamed of leave, prayed for it. What a time he could have with his little old treasure box. Time after time he was on the verge of throwing in the sponge. But always there rushed to him a vivid picture—a picture of Stokes, gat spatting, dashing to his aid that night back of Le Petit Casino. No! Be —— if he'd give in. Stokes hadn't turned tail on him. He'd told Stokes he'd clear up the business and he would—or bust.

The day he pulled in from Doullens, the black cashbox under his wing, he stepped into an encouraging clue. He gathered it up from the floor of the C. O.'s hut—a tiny bit of crumpled paper on which had been scrawled:

> I have nothing to fear, you know. You'll meet me at the swimming pool at three. I've got to have your answer today—and no hedging. J.

"How long's his nibs been gone?" Tobin enquired of a runner, sunning on the doorstep.

"Five minutes," came the drawl.

"Let's go," said Tobin to himself, and he sped away.

Dogging the tracks of the C. O., Tobin hoped that his visit to the mud bath would be at one of those fashionable moments. Heinie hadn't spoken for a day or so and Tobin didn't like his inactivity. Tobin hung around outside the dressing shack till the traffic lessened. Then he poked within. On the pegs hung a pair of outfits. The lapels of one tunic bore scarlet tabs.

"Jamieson's, I'll bet," judged Tub. Peering through a crack onto the pool he saw the officer in question talking earnestly with a white-lipped C. O.

"I wonder whether—" said Tobin.

With little compunction he unhooked Jamieson's tunic and dipped into the pockets. He searched to no avail.

"Bum guess," he said, and helped himself to one of Jamieson's cigarets.

It was then he noticed the slip of paper tucked behind the plush lining of the fancy case. A trembling hand drew it out. Creased and soiled it was, but it was the paper he sought. Fortune indeed had been kind to him. He transferred the document to his own pay-book and was just placing Jamieson's tunic back on its peg when that gentleman's voice, brimming ugliness, rang in his ear.

"You'll hand that over."

Tobin flushed guiltily. But he had no idea of handing anything over. He took a firm grip on his treasure chest and prepared to stand his ground.

"I can't," he said quietly.

"Hand it over," repeated Jamieson. "It doesn't concern you, or your affairs."

"Guess it does—more'n you think."

"Hand it over."

"No!—I won't."

Jamieson changed his tactics, appealing to the C. O. in the pool.

"I've caught one of your men, colonel," he called, "a miserable thief, in here."

"Coming," called the C. O.

Out of the blue sky—out of the silence—something whined hair-raisingly.

"*Wow-w-w-w— Crash!*"

A great column of water sprang high into the air. The eight-inch had taken another pot shot.

It hadn't been Jamieson's intention to let Tobin reach the street. As a matter of fact the force of the explosion tossed both of them there quicker than you could say Jack Robinson. Tobin was the first to find his feet. He shook himself and started down street. Behind him he heard Jamieson call frantically:

"Stop thief! Stop that fellow!"

But no one was interfering with Tobin, who plowed on like a steam roller. Pat-pat-pat-pat sounded Jamieson's shoeless feet in pursuit. All along the route men stuck their heads from windows and turned loose their imagination.

"Look at a race!"

"Who's de Venus de Millbank behind?"

"The skin I'd like to touch."

"Yah! Wid a brick."

"Go to it, fat fellow. I'm betting on you."

Breathless—it was a matter of a good half mile—Tub Tobin tore down the graveled drive, through the shrubbery, and up the steps of the chateau. Brigade headquarters, he knew, were there. It was old Birdseed he wanted to see—had to see. He finally got the door-bar to work and fell inside. Before him stretched a long, carpeted hall. Through the first door he plunged.

Old Birdseed looked up from his toddy, remarking with a smile—

"So we meet again, young fellow."

"Yes, sir," gulped Tobin.

"Name—Tobin, isn't it?"

Tobin didn't answer—he was unable to. For a pair of lean arms thrust up behind him had clamped about his neck. His wind was shut off. All he could manage was a *blub-blub-blub*. He heard Jamieson explaining—

"A thief, general. Ordinary pickpocket. He has something of mine. Stole it at the bath house. May I search him, sir?"

"Certainly, Jamieson." Old Birdseed had risen to his feet. He watched Jamieson whirl Tobin into the corner and dig up the something.

"A mere scrap of paper? Why all the fuss over it?" This from old Birdseed, idly curious.

"Some new code stuff I was working on, sir," lied Jamieson who turned to a near-by table on which rested a burning spirit lamp. Old Birdseed had been heating his liquor there. Jamieson casually stuck the telltale paper in the flame. In an instant it had gone to ashes filtering between his thin fingers onto the costly carpet.

"Oh, ——!" Tub Tobin was actually crying. Everything had gone "blooey." He dropped his head on his arms. The wind had been taken out of his sails of hope.

"I'll ring for the sergeant-major," interposed Jamieson. "This man can't reach the guard house too soon."

"You go upstairs this minute and cover your nakedness," said old Birdseed. "I'll look after the fellow for the time being."

Jamieson went pat-pat-pat-patting down the hall.

Old Birdseed pressed a button on his desk, lighted a long cigar, and sat back in his chair.

"How's your eye, boy?" he enquired of Tub.

Tobin looked up and found the brigadier offering a type-written sheet for his inspection.

"Read it through, Tobin, and tell me what you think of it," said old Birdseed.

Tub waved it aside.

"I can't," he blurted out. "I came here for help—I came to tell you——"

"Ring off," rasped old Birdseed. "Read it."

Tobin read with smarting eyes. The thing in part ran:

> With such assistance I shall be able to put in operation this coming Summer the school of instruction I have so long indorsed and fought for. One hundred thousand francs, roughly, will put the school across. What patriotic gentleman of means will come forth from our midst and put his name to a subscription of that amount?

"Pretty good—hits the nail on the head, doesn't it?" old Birdseed asked as Tobin looked up.

"You said it, sir," replied Tobin, wiping his eyes with the back of his sleeve.

"And, sir," he calmly continued, "I'd like to subscribe that money."

Old Birdseed went a beety color.

"Don't be insulting, boy," he whipped out. "I stand for so much, then——"

"Farthest thing from my mind," said Tobin, brightening up. His eye twinkled mischievously. "Recently, general, I came into an inheritance. An old French uncle left it to me. I can not use it—it's no use to me. I'll put my monicker to the subscription you're askin' for."

For old Birdseed's benefit he thrust out the black box he'd been guarding so zealously.

"There," he said.

"Your lunch?" asked old Birdseed with a suggestion of sarcasm.

"No, sir! Your school of instruction. One hundred thousand francs—to the last cent." Tobin flipped back the lid, exhibiting packet after packet of dusty French paper. "Took them to a Doullens bank, yesterday. Had 'em counted. They're all there—one hundred thousand."

"Merry Christmas," was all the brigadier could say.

Tobin rattled on. "An' I'll subscribe it, I say, provided you'll listen to a complaint I've got to make——"

Old Birdseed had cut in—

"Well, if it's anything about Captain Jamieson, as I fully believe it is, you might as well forget it. In my brigade, at least, one is not permitted to speak disparagingly of his superiors."

The curtains behind them had parted. An immaculate Jamieson entered.

"Nervy gaffir, isn't he, sir?" he said, referring to Tobin.

"Lots of nerve," said old Birdseed,

pushing the call button for the second time. Then he got up, cleared his throat, and about-faced.

"A few minutes ago—" his voice dripped sting—"the Hun dropped a shell in the swimming place. Your colonel, Tobin, got it badly. He petered out on the spot. But before he died he got something off his chest—unburdened his conscience. What he said was said to me over the phone. Told as well as a dying man could tell it."

Old Birdseed wheeled like a tiger at bay.

"You, Jamieson—" he thrust a finger in his subordinate's face—"you are an unspeakable cur. For two cents, old as I am, I'd doff my tunic and whale daylight out of you."

"Why? What do you mean, sir?" asked a now shaky Jamieson.

"Mean? Why, I mean that Stokes case of last week. You know too well, you lily-livered thing. Your pardner in crime told me all. Wasn't that poor Stokes' warning message you burned here a short while back? Wasn't it? Answer me. *Wasn't it?*"

Jamieson of the pale puttees and the flaring breeches hung his head. The starch had gone out of his spine if not out of his dress. A faint "Yes, sir," issued from his bloodless lips.

Old Birdseed glanced about.

"Are you there, major?" he called.

"Here, sir," was the snappy response, and a newcomer stepped into the room.

Old Birdseed frowned.

"I had to ring twice for you, major. Please do not let it occur again."

"No, sir!"

Old Birdseed cleared his throat, then added:

"Captain Jamieson is under arrest, major. You will consider yourself his escort until further notified."

The massive hall door had clanged shut. Old Birdseed was saying:

"There I've gone and kicked myself out of my school. If I'd let you talk, Tobin, I presume I would have had the money. But I had to put on the drama, myself, and spoil things."

Tub Tobin fondled the money box provocatively.

"I take it for granted, general, that Mr. Stokes will be cleared of all blame?"

"Complete exoneration, my boy, with all possible speed."

"Well, I guess our deal's off, unless——"

Old Birdseed broke in—

"Unless you'd like a job in this school of mine, if I get it, a job of teaching the young idea how to shoot."

"No, thanks, sir," declined Tobin. "I'm kinda fed up on France. Two years an' a half of it takes the pep out of a guy. I think I'd like a rest."

"Rest?"

"Yep! A good long one—one of them instructor jobs back in Canada. I saw in orders where they're callin' for sergeant instructors."

Old Birdseed thumped the table with his fist.

"Done," he cried. "I can fix you up with one of those very jobs. It will take a lot of wire pulling at this late hour and I'll likely get hauled over the coals for it, but—but it's worth the chance. A batch of instructors are sailing from blighty the first of the week. You'll be on that sailing list, Tobin."

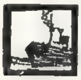
"It's a go," enthused Tub. "Let's shake on it, sir."

"Now," gloated old Birdseed, "now—the money."

Tub Tobin smilingly tucked the black box under his arm. "First," he said, "my move order home—then, general, your money."

Tobin had gone. Old Birdseed, toddy at elbow, sat back in his chair, ruminating.

"Smart lad, that Tobin. But he slipped up today. Let me get away with that cash too easily. Luck? I'll say it is. You never know your luck."



TUB TOBIN, sporting white chevrons—three on each arm—looked out on the broad Atlantic. The good ship *Caronia* was already a day out from Liverpool.

"Home again, no more to roam again," he hummed with a smile. "Jimminy crickets! I'll bet old Birdseed tore his hair when he found out about that money.

"Imagine me goin' to all that trouble to get it, —— fool I was, an' then to have a pimple-face of a Frenchie bank clerk tell me:

"'*Pas bon, m'sieur. Pas bon!* This money ees the money of the old gambling days. Since the war its issue has been called in. It has no value now—none whatever.' "

The CAMP-FIRE
A MEETING-PLACE for READERS, WRITERS and ADVENTURERS

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

A NEW ZEALAND doctor comrade tells of two Irish girls who are treating the wanderlust bug. We aren't quite sure whether we've got the doctor's signature correct. I regret to say that he doesn't write much better than I do myself.

Dunedin, New Zealand.

I see a letter from a lady member of Camp-Fire who lives in Oakland, California, and is bitten sadly with the wanderlust. For her and other lady members, I tell the following:

A SHORT while ago two ladies called to see me. They were nurses and came some six months ago from the same port of Ireland as I do. They informed me that they were on a tour of the world, earning their living as they went along. They led me to believe that they would be another six months in New Zealand until they had saved up enough to take them to Australia or Canada and so on. Of course, I do not know what their initial capital was except that it was a small one. They were both over twenty-five years old, above the average intelligence and quite capable of looking after themselves. They were keeping to the British Dominions and were members of the Young Women's Christian Association, which has branches in all parts of the world.

I certainly don't advise any young girl to leave her home to wander around the world by herself. The dangers are too many, but it can be done by those willing to take the risk. I have been a silent member of Camp-Fire for over eighteen months.—Dr. R. P. Thomson, Jr.

FROM Gordon Young something concerning his story in this issue:

Los Angeles, California.

The story has something more in it than a breezy minute's entertainment; it is a glimpse of the Old Waterfront and the good hearts of hard men that came on shore for a bit of fun. I have taken up the writing of these Waterfront stories because I realize that these days are gone, never to come back; the saloons and the dives are gone; Red Light Abatement and Prohibition have made them remote; those days belong to the past, and though they were full of vice, their virtues were as brilliant as the vices were red.

And this is true: I *never* saw a fight between these men but that, if it was a good fight, fought with a strong heart and to the last gasp, they went to the bar and drank together. The fights with them unless it grew out of an old grudge, were all part of the fun ashore, as athletic clubmen give each other a friendly punching with gloves.

The man called *The Duke* was, I may say, the son of a former judge of the United States Supreme Court.

Only last week I met by chance on the street the man I have called *Webster*—it was twelve years since I had heard from him. He was still a great-shouldered fellow with a good-natured grin and massive fists.

'Arry Coy has vanished long ago; perhaps he again went overboard off the 'Orn, and this time a shark got him or the 'ot whisky was not potent enough to revive the big heart in the small body.—GORDON YOUNG.

AS YOU may have guessed, *Adventure's* readers have quite a reputation among fiction writers—the reputation of being the most watchful and exacting magazine audience in the world. They've learned—some of them by bitter experience—that it's very, very unsafe to be anything but absolutely sure of their local color and, in general, of all fact material used in the making of their stories. They may get by the editors, who are far from knowing everything about everything, but they know they can't get by the readers. No matter how small, obscure and little known a point may be, there is sure to be anywhere from one reader to scores of readers who not only know enough to catch a slip on that point but are good enough friends of *Adventure* to write in and point out the mistake.

Which is as it should be. Readers and editors alike want our magazine as accurate as it can be made on the facts used in its fiction. Still better, our writers have caught the same attitude and strive sincerely to be dependable as well as interesting. They take pride in not being caught napping, and, if caught, take friendly criticism as friendly help.

It is you readers who have brought about this highly satisfactory state of affairs. Keep it up.

Here's one on cuckoo clocks, coming out of our cache where it's lain for a year or so:

Holdredge, Nebraska.

Just a friendly jibe at F. R. Buckley in his story "Appearances." Evidently F. R. has not observed cuckoo clocks very closely, as he has *Mr. Garfield* state that he sat there two days with that buzzard shrieking every hour.

A cuckoo clock calls either once on the half hour and the number of hours on the hour, or else once, twice, three and four times during each hour on the quarter, followed by a quail call announcing the hour. The former clock has two weights and one bird. The latter three weights and two birds. Therefore *Mr. Garfield* would have been annoyed every half hour or every fifteen minutes.

Secondly a cuckoo clock unless fitted with double length chains will not operate over 30 hours.

I sold for three years for one of the three firms that import practically all the cuckoo clocks sold in this country.—CURTIS L. RYAN.

SOMETHING from Douglas Oliver in connection with his story in this issue:

Chatham, Ontario, Canada.

I have a very vivid recollection of the day the mayor of an old French town at the foot of Vimy Ridge returned to his battered home and there, in plain view of hundreds of Canadian fighting-men, recovered from the ruins something like 50,000 francs. What a stir it caused! Next morning every man in the neighborhood was digging up old cellars.
—DOUGLAS OLIVER.

Several points in this story of Mr. Oliver's caused us to query him concerning them. Here is his letter in reply:

Chatham, Ontario.

Your points raised were:

1. Would a brigadier be allowed to start a musketry school by private subscription?
2. If D. H. Q. authorized the establishment wouldn't D. A. D. O. S. supply all requirements in the usual routine manner?
3. Would the brigadier compute the cost in French currency?
4. What pre-war currency was called in?

Permit me to work backward on these questions.

4. I know of no French pre-war currency that was actually called in, but I recall, and you will too, probably, paper money that was "no good" in towns other than that town possessing the bank which issued it. I still have some old notes that shop-keepers persisted in rejecting, calling it "*Pas bon—avant la guerre*" breed. Properly speaking, it may not have been called in but it certainly had no purchasing value. You couldn't blame those shop-keepers, either, for many of the old banking places had failed to survive Hun bombardments—and if the banks, themselves, had gone "blooey" it was quite natural those shop-keepers should view the banknotes in the same light.

3. I think it is proper that the brigadier—a Canadian, mind you—should compute the cost of his school in French currency. We Canadians always referred to money matters in the "franc" language—never used "dollars and cents" or "sterling." The thing closest to our hearts—our bank chit-book—likewise talked in terms of francs.

2. Perhaps my reply to No. 1 may iron this out some.

1. I see no reason why a brigadier—if possessed of means and swinging the pull that old *Birdseed* of the story did—could not start a musketry school by private subscription. I have no school of this sort in mind but I do recall hospitals and convalescent homes established through public subscription and turned over to the military. The Eaton motor-machine-gun battery—gift of the Toronto Eatons—made a great name for itself, you will recall, around Villers-Brettoneux in the Hun drive of '18. At one time—so I'm informed—the Canadian Corps considered the establishment of a truck-garden farm in France with a view to bettering the rations of the Canadian Corps—this garden to be manned by expert agriculturists, volunteering their services from Canada along with the latest farming implements. I won't vouch for this although I have a sneaking suspicion the same farm was operated and profitably so.

Now, the dream-school of old *Birdseed's* may seem far-fetched to some but if it tended to improve conditions as old *Birdseed* maintained it would, I do not think permission to establish it would have been refused him. Of course there are different viewpoints, but with our Canadian Corps I imagine it would have gone across flying. The average reader of "Tub Tobin Repeats" will infer, I had hoped, that there were no obstacles in *Birdseed's* path once he had the necessary money in hand. Your point on D. A. D. O. S. supplying all requirements—equipment, etc., is well taken. However I feel that it bears little on the story, as I have tried to show in the narrative that the money question was the great question with *Birdseed;* that all other matters pertaining to the establishment of his pet school had been worked out.

I tried to get in touch with Brig. Gen. King of London, O. C. our No. 1 Military Division, regarding your first question, but I couldn't raise him—out of the city, I presume.—DOUGLAS OLIVER.

While not convinced that our queries have been shoved off the board, the story as it stands makes good reading and we've let it go as written, merely bringing up at the same time the above points, as to facts in the material used. Ordinarily we'd have threshed the matter out thoroughly before the story went into print, but in this case there was pressure of time.

NOW here's another one concerning cow-milking snakes and such. As toastmaster or sergeant at arms or janitor or whatever it is of Camp-Fire I ought to preserve a neutral attitude as much as possible in discussions of this kind. Well, I've come out flat as a non-believer in hoop-snakes and several other queer kinds of snake, and, to be fair, I ought to believe in, say, milk-snakes.

HAVE already declared for 'em, in fact, to the extent of declining to dismiss 'em as non-existent because scientists say a snake's jaws are such that he can't milk a cow with them. That's easy to get around, for one theory of us believers is that the snake coils around the udder, squeezing it gently and in the best agricultural manner with its body while it swings its head down, opens its mouth and receives the stream as it is milked out. Of course, one snake can't hold very much milk, but if one snake can milk why can't there be lots of snakes around at milking-time? And anyhow, if a snake can swell up and hold a young rabbit, a rat or two and an armful of toads and such, why can't he swell up and hold that much milk?

But my main reason for believing in cow-milking snakes is to be neutral on the general question of eccentric snakes. Also I like to believe in 'em. There's too much skepticism in this age anyhow and these cow-milking snakes strike me as a darned good idea. As to the scientists, well, I wish one of them would tell me why my own cows give so little milk after we've had them a while. Several scientists have tried, both by mail and from personal observation and study, and beyond prescribing new ineffective diets, they don't get us or the cows anywhere. None of the local practical farmers offers any better advice, but of course they may know what the trouble is and be just waiting for me to get plumb disgusted and sell the cows off cheap—to them. What I'm asking the scientists is: If snakes aren't milking them, then what *is* the matter? Snakes are just as good a theory as any I've heard so far.

AFTER very serious consideration of the following letter I'm rather inclined to think that comrade Roe is not a believer in cow-milking snakes. All right, comrade Roe, but then what the —— is the matter with my cows?

Hibbing, Minnesota.

My grandfather once told me that he used to have a cow that was part Holstein and part Jersey and part Alderney and part something else, Southdown, I guess, but it was some cow as cows ran in those days and every day she used to give down fifteen quarts and three gills at a milking, if properly approached, and one Sunday night in August in 1834—my grandfather said he remembered the year the stars were so few and thin owing to so many of them having fallen down the year before; why, for months at a time there wouldn't be more than six or seven stars in the sky at one time, they were the longest time getting back, my grandfather said—well this cow, her name was Juliet, come that Sunday night only gave down twelve quarts and three gills and my grandfather said he put it down to the hot weather for the next morning's milking was the usual fifteen quarts and three gills, and he wouldn't have thought much of it, only next night, being Monday and another hot day there were only nine quarts and three gills in the pail when my grandfather had finished milking and Tuesday night there were only six quarts and three gills, and Wednesday night she only yielded three quarts and three gills, and Thursday night only the three gills, all this while the mornings' milking being the full amount, my grandfather being so interested in the arithmetical retrogression that he didn't worry as to the cause much, but spent each day wondering how much she'd give that evening, he having a job in Hoskin's shoe-shop running a pegging-machine, so all day Friday he was wondering how much she would give that night, and she didn't give anything, but instead drank two quarts one pint and one gill out of a pail he had filled from another cow—of course, he couldn't measure the milk because it was in the cow, but the pail lacked just that much of being full, my grandfather said—and next night she drank five quarts and one pint and one gill of another cow's milk that was just plain cow, no fancy mixture like her, so Sunday he laid off and spent all day in the pasture with her to find out what was the matter, and along about four o'clock she waded into a tarn until her udders were under water, and something seemed to hitch on to her and my grandfather jumped in beside her and felt under her and found a frog that was sucking her dry, so he killed the frog and took it home, and my grandfather said that frog was pure black and just as big as his thumb, and that night the cow gave her usual fifteen quarts and three gills and kept it up after that until she got old and was sold to the butcher. Truthfully yours,—C. E. Roe.

HERE'S a bit from the letter that accompanied the manuscript of one of Richard C. Gill's stories when he sent it to us. A story of his is in this issue:

Ithaca, New York.

Would like to say that I first saw *Adventure* in a little town up on the Parana River in Argentina—and it "took" immediately. Since then I have read it in a good many strange places and in a good many strange ships. Of its kind it has a truly remarkable appeal.

Have sent a very short sketch, done on an Antarctic steam whaler.—Richard C. Gill.

A WORD as to North Americans on the other side of the border:

Fresno, California.

Just finished reading Frederick R. Bechdolt's reply to E. Hann of Argentina and oh, boy! isn't it good! It really is a dirty shame that Americans (in many cases model Christian men at home) who step across the border are so in the habit of leaving their virtues at home. Have seen a great deal of that along the Mexican border and have always said the gringo is in many instances to blame for the trouble he gets into. However, the Latin-American ideals and motives are different from the North American Anglo-Saxon, so they don't mix well unless the North American is very careful not to trample on the other fellow's toes. Far too many North Americans forget, when south of the Rio Grande, that they are only guests and should be gentlemen. Far too many were not "gentlemen" at home and so had to go south.—J. R. Kingham.

SO MANY letters came to us from old pioneers of the West's cattle-driving days in response to Camp-Fire's call for real testimony as to whether Arthur Henry, in the *International Book Review*, was justified in his scathing criticism of the local color of Emerson Hough's "North of 36" that we can not hear all of them at one or even two Camp-Fires. The second instalment of letters follows.

The evidence is overwhelmingly in support of Hough's accuracy in his portrayal of conditions in the old West of those days, the evidence, being the best obtainable anywhere in the world, is final in nature and I'm glad that *Adventure*, in collecting it, has been instrumental in helping to clear the memory of Emerson Hough from aspersions upon his sincerity and reliability as a writer.

From Gilbert Ellis Bailey, Ph. D., University of Southern California, author of "California, a Geological Wonderland:"

University of Southern California,
Department of Geology,
Los Angeles.

I am glad that you have taken the educational stand for more truth in historical stories and scenarios. I have recommended *Adventure* for years as being accurate in history and free from "gush."

MY RIGHT to criticize:—"Who's Who" puts me down as an aged university professor. It is true that I was a "Prof.", in the University of Nebraska fifty years ago—1874; and I am still in the classroom at the University of Southern California; but this book does not show how my vacations have been spent, or how certain years have been given to other work for the deliberate purpose "for to go and for to see" how the "other fellow" lives. Being tall—6.4—and strong I was "on the plains" in 1867, and since then the record has run: trapper, buffalo hunter, scout, stage-driver, assayer, miner, war correspondent, explorer, etc. Jim Bridger taught me to trap, and I have known most of the "Old Timers" from Kit Carson to Hickok and Cody. I've crossed the Chisholm Trail in many places and followed it for miles.

If this qualifies me to express an opinion let me say Stuart Henry is right in all of his criticisms. I knew and admired Emerson Hough for he was a real he-man, a fine adventurer and a pleasing writer of *fiction*. He seemed to have been misled by the mirage of romance, seeing things of beauty where only a few squalid mud huts really existed.

BY THE great Horned Toad (*Phrynosoma cornutium*) it makes the blood of the "Old Timers" boil to read, or see on the screen, the "hokum" put over as history. There is no excuse for such travesties as shown in "The Covered Wagon," or "Wild Bill Hickok."

Crossing the plains and desert in the early days was dirty, disagreeable and dangerous; but the pictures give little idea of the patient bravery of the women, or the steadfastness of the men on their way to make new homes in the West. The per cent. of tough men from Bitter Creek, two-gun men, gamblers, was small—no more than are found in our cities of today. Why glorify the criminal and moron and pass the real heroes by?

Mark Twain's "Roughing It," "The Virginian," and the writers in *Adventure* use many a true fact. By the way if you wish to read two *good* true books, just published, get Capt. James Cook's "Fifty Years on the Frontier," by the Yale Press; or Col. Wheeler's "The Frontier Trail," by Times-Mirror Press, Los Angeles. Knowing both authors for many years, I can recommend the books as true.—GILBERT ELLIS BAILEY.

P.S.—If you see the dramatic "Life of Abraham Lincoln," now showing in N. Y., you'll see my name as historical director.

THE following article by Walter Prescott Webb, professor of history in the University of Texas, appeared in the Dallas *Morning News*. It is a calm but thorough indictment of Mr. Henry's criticism and in particular emphasizes what should be more generally brought to attention—that Mr. Henry has sometimes misquoted Hough and then criticized him for the misquotations. Except for the opening paragraphs the article is given here in full:

Could the West be heard in its own behalf, it would ask no more than an examination of Mr. Henry's assertions. If they can stand, then "The Covered Wagon" and "North of 36" should be suppressed and much of the history of the West rewritten.

The West does ask to be heard. It believes that justice can be done only by finding truth, and in this humble spirit it begs an examination of the following excerpts from Mr. Henry's review:

> 1. *Parallel* 36 * * * *furnishes the title for this story of the fortunes and misfortunes of* * * * *Tassie Lockhart and her herd of forty-five hundred Texas steers and cows and their cowboys.* * * * *Mr. Hough errs strangely in representing that so large a herd could be driven over the Chisholm Trail in* '67. *That was a very exceptional number for any year.*

True, too many cows for '67, and a goodly, though not impossible, number for any year. Hough perhaps used a large herd to make the obstacles to a successful drive more real. But note the inaccuracy of the reviewer. He mentions the size of the herd twice and exaggerates it each time. The Del Sol started with 4,342 head and reached Abilene, Kan., with 3,000. Is it quite fair in the reviewer to add 150 to 1,500 head to the herd and then charge the author with making it too large?

> 2. *Their devious course* * * * *stretched from the Red River* * * * *to Abilene, Kan.*

An error in both history and geography. The herd started near the present Lockhart, Texas. When it reached Red River it was 290 miles from its starting point and had covered almost half its long journey.

> 3. *It (the Chisholm Trail) was a unique trail, yet it has never entered into Wild West fiction; and, in spite of its importance, the Chisholm Trail has also been neglected by the historians.*

The Chisholm Trail was unique because there was no such trail—there were trails, continually shifting. They were known as the Texas Trail, Kansas Trail, Texas Trace, Cattle Trail and Chisholm Trail. If, by "Chisholm Trail," the reviewer means the Cattle Trail, then his statement that it has not entered fiction will not stand. Andy Adams' "Log of the Cowboy" is the classic of the Texas Trail. Adams, Hough and Rollins have all written history and literature of the trail. McArthur of Texas and Dals of Oklahoma have done research of the most scholarly sort into the Texas cattle industry and the cattle trails.

> 4. *Almost no one now lives who saw the Chisholm Trail or that early village of Abilene, Kan.*

In November the Trail Drivers of Texas met at San Antonio—200 men who went up the trail with cattle to Abilene and other places. These are but a small part of those living who did so—there are others scattered throughout the West.

> 5. *No cattle trails, however, extended from the Gulf to Canada or within* 600 *miles of the Canadian line. There was no need that they should.*

The Del Sol herd did not go from the Gulf to Canada. But, since the point has been raised, let us get the truth. Many of the largest ranches in Texas were (and are) in the southern tip of the State. Not only were cattle driven from these ranches, but they were brought over from Mexico and driven north.

Did they go within 600 miles of Canada? Under date of Dec. 16, 1923, Andy Adams writes: "Ask any old cowman around Austin regarding the Day brothers, Tony and Charles, who crossed into Canada with cattle and established beef ranches. The Texas and Montana Cattle Trail crossed the Yellowstone and ran beyond to the Milk River and other points." When Mr. Henry says there was no need that the cattle should be driven north of the railroad connection, he reveals a lack of information about the cattle industry which should seal his lips on the subject forever. Cattle were driven north of Kansas, not for a market, but for better range. This is the most elementary bit of knowledge one could have of the Texas cattle industry.

> 6. *To represent Texans as dominating such a festivity as the Fourth of July is to mistake the temper of the Texans of that day. They considered themselves Texans, not Americans. They saw no excuse for recognizing the glorious Fourth. The Alamo provided the single historic date they worshiped, the Lone Star supplied their only emblem, and they had little use for the Stars and Bars.*

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Mr. Henry knows that Texas once belonged to Mexico, but he does not know that these Texans were Americans, all from the States. Texans do have a strong State pride, and a flag that flies from all public buildings. But just above the Lone Star floats Old Glory. Texans have always celebrated the Fourth of July. Twenty years before this cattle drive, an American army was invading Mexico. At the head of this army rode a regiment of Texas rangers. On July 4, 1846, these rangers put on a celebration in Mexico that would make the Del Sol festivities look tame. (See Reed, "Texas Rangers," p. 60.)

WOULD Mr. Henry argue that twenty years under the American flag had weakened the Texans' patriotism? The Alamo had no "date" and Texans celebrate nothing in connection with its fall. Texans celebrate March 2, the date of the declaration of independence, and San Jacinto Day—April 21—when Santa Anna was beaten and captured. To say that "the Alamo provides the single historic date they worshiped" is like saying that Lexington furnished the single date Americans celebrate. Yet the man guilty of the mistakes above warns that "danger to historical truth, to living facts, lies inevitably in the path of rapid romantic writing."

Did Texans have little use for the Stars and Bars?

Their regard for the Confederate flag, under which 60,000 had fought, is not an issue in Hough's book and any discussion of it would be a digression. However, if Mr. Henry could be induced to make such a statement before the Trail Drivers next year, a lot of us would like to be present as unofficial observers.

> 7. *The one historic character appearing by name in "North of 36" is Wild Bill Hickok. But Wild Bill was not Marshal in '67, nor was he in the village then. Abilene had no Marshal.*

Of course Abilene had no Marshal in '67. At that time Wild Bill was Marshal of Hays City. It is only the careless reader who gets the idea that Wild Bill was Marshal of Abilene. "I'm not living in this town," says Wild Bill, "though I may be later." Hough always speaks of him as the "future Town Marshal of Abilene." (See pages 319, 327, 397.) At the very end of the book, when all Abilene came to tell the departing Texans good-by, occurs this passage: "Among all these others also came Wild Bill Hickok, future Town Marshal of Abilene" (p. 408).

No other historic characters than Wild Bill? How about Jesse Chisholm, Armour, Plankinton?

> 8. *The reviewer calls Abilene the "steer metropolis" and tells us parenthetically that, "Steer, not cow, was the generic term used."*

That certainly is news to all Texans; to George W. Saunders, president of the Trail Drivers; to Andy Adams, and all the cowmen of the West. Right this way, ladies and gentlemen, to see Abilene, the steer town full of steer men, steer boys all on their steer horses and steer ponies. That is the way the West should talk!

Near the end of his review this well-informed critic tells us Westerners what our ancestors were like:

> They were gaunt, homely, hungry, leading a rawbone and rawhide existence. Many excellent traits they had, but their life was necessarily hard, even to sordidness. They and their women folk furnished figures too wizened, weary, forlorn, for the buoyant pages of adolescent pageantry.

"Maligning Our Neighbors in Fiction" is the general title under which the review appears, a review filled with evidences of careless reading, with exaggerations, inconsistencies, errors in history and in geography. The extremes to which the review goes is perhaps the best defense of the book condemned. It is for those who know the West, its literature and history, to decide whether Hough or Henry maligned his neighbor.

THE following paragraphs are taken from a long news item appearing in both the Houston *Chronicle* and the Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*, copies of which were sent to us by W. H. Day of Cameron, Tex., A W. Woodruff, a trustee of the San-Saba Pecan Company, and by John Sarge of Brady, Texas. The parts of their letters bearing on this matter also follow:

Brady, Texas.

I have only lived here in this county 33 years, but was here in west Texas in 1883. Never heard of a steer town, but cow town in plentiful and there are many of them left that are proud of the name "cow town." I believe Henry is not well posted on Chisholm Trail. Believe there were many of them and the original not above the Red River.—John Sarge.

San Saba, Texas.

Myself a Northern man, I can not speak with authority regarding the accuracy of historical matters set forth in "North of 36," but I knew Mr. Hough personally and can assert unqualifiedly that he was a most careful and painstaking workman in preparing his material for stories, consequently it would take more than the assertion of Mr. Henry to make me think his book was inaccurate in its historical data.

Right here in the county where I live are at least two of the old-timers who rode with the trail herds, and both of them are acquainted with Mrs. Amanda Burks, as well as dozens of others who rode the Chisholm and other pioneer trails.

So far as pioneer evidence is concerned, the account of action taken in this matter at the recent Cattlemen's Convention should convince any one that the old boys are still able to throw their own loops. In the concluding words of Mr. Utecht's article, "The pioneer has again taken to the trail," and Mr. Henry has got to be "rarin' to go," and "come a smokin' and ridin' high," if he can make good his criticism regarding Mr. Hough's accuracy as to facts.—A. W. Woodruff.

Cameron, Texas.

Enclosed is clipping from Houston *Chronicle* which gives the opinion of the old trail men as to Henry.

I went to Kansas in 1873 with 2,300 head of cattle, in 1874 with 2,500, and in 1878 with 3,800 and put in the Winter of 1876 and 1877 in a buffalo camp near the head of the Colorado River in Texas, so I think I should know something of those times.—W. H. Day.

ONLY parts of the article follow, since most of its ground is covered by our own letters direct from pioneers:

When the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association met in Houston recently, probably the most dramatic incident of the convention came when William Atkinson of Goliad, himself a veteran trail driver, stood before the delegates, bitterly denounced Henry, declared his statements false and then presented Mrs. Amanda Burks, a woman 88 years old, a living refutation of Henry's declaration that no Texas woman ever went to Kansas with a cattle drive.

MRS. BURKS, owner of LaMotta ranch near Cotulla, consisting of 45,000 acres, made the long trip from the Nueces River in south Texas across Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas, on into the hills of Wyoming, accompanying her husband when he took a large herd of cattle to that State. Other women made the journey to Abilene, Kan.

Hough, in his novel, pictures the heroine, Tassie Lockhart, as going with her ranch boss to Abilene, when he took several thousand head from a point south of Austin to Kansas, for sale, this being the first drive from such a distant point. Mrs. Burks was the original Tassie. Hough made generous use of Mrs. Burks' experiences for Tassie's thrilling life on the prairies. Instead of being an exaggeration, his story really fell short, according to veterans of the trail, and Mrs. Burks herself. When the aged woman arose in the convention hall at suggestion of Atkinson, there was prolonged applause.

HOUGH based his story upon facts gathered by George W. Saunders of San Antonio, president of the Old-Time Trail Drivers' Association. Saunders, now 70 years old, drove cattle north himself and spent many years collecting data on experiences of trail drivers, which he has compiled in two volumes. The books merely recite facts, giving names, dates and places and are replete with thrillers that show the pioneers of the ranch and trail were anything but "wizened, gaunt, sordid and unromantic." Hough went through these books on receiving permission of Saunders and kept close to facts and conditions that existed in Texas in the 60's. The famous novelist gave Saunders full credit for his cooperation and for furnishing him the basis of his story.

MR. SAUNDERS is quoted on Mr. Henry as follows:

"He can see nothing beautiful or colorful in the life of the true-hearted little women who followed their husbands along paths that led into unknown lands—often daughters of proud Virginia families who would have graced the White House ballroom. Because these women did not drink bootleg whisky, rouge their lips to invite kisses of the libertine, indulge in cigarets, half dress; because they did not curse or nurse poodle dogs instead of children, they must appear hideous to this critic.

"The pioneer cattleman had the buoyancy of a trained athlete; he had a purposeful eye and a coat of tan. He may not have possessed the beauty of an Apollo, but by George, he was a man."

BUT the Cattle Raisers' Association and the Trail Drivers are not the only plaintiffs seeking to convict Henry. They are joined by the Southwestern Political and Social Science Association. When this latter organization met in Fort Worth a few days ago, W. P. Webb, a professor of history in the University of Texas, denounced Henry and his motion that a committee of three be appointed to investigate Henry's statements carried unanimously.

FROM an old-timer who doesn't like to see his name in print.

Fallon, Nevada

I did not get into that country as early as 1867, for I was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, in that year. In 1873 went to Fort Smith. Relatives were connected with the Federal Court, and we went up the river, as there were no railroads west of Little Rock at that time.

IN 1881 I went to Santa Fé on my own hook and was in New Mexico most of the time until 1907. In 1884 I was riding for the "Triangle Dot" outfit in N. E. New Mexico and was working with a number of old-time Texas punchers and many of them trail men. As I remember, their language and actions were very much as written by Hough. We frequently worked with Texas outfits, as our range bordered on the western edge of the Panhandle, and occasionally saw an old-time "pack outfit," which I am sure antedated the "ox-cart" outfit.

We seldom heard the term "steer" which Mr. Henry says was used. It was "cow outfit," "cow ranch," "cow puncher." When referring to steers the term used was "beef cattle," "beef herd," "beef roundup," also a drive or herd of beeves, as against a drive of "stock cattle."

I was not an old-timer myself but was associated with them, and a particular friend of mine, much older than I, was an ex-Confederate soldier, on the dodge as the result of a shooting scrape, who was "up the trail" several times and told me a great deal.

I AM of the opinion that Mr. Henry was too critical. I did not read "North of 36" so closely as to spot inaccuracies, but I considered it a very accurate portrayal of things as they were done in those days.

As to the herd of 4,500 beeves. Mr. Henry is right. I have seen 3,000 head in one herd, but it was rather unwieldy, very hard to handle until after some weeks on the trail. 2,600 to 2,800 was generally considered the proper-sized herd to trail most economically, but it was not impossible to drive 4,500, although hardly practical.— ——

DON'T forget that we are selling our cover originals by a new system. Covers will be auctioned by mail as heretofore, but instead of holding all bids until the end of the year, we can send each cover to the highest bidder one month after the issue of the magazine bearing that cover has appeared on the news-stands. Thus bidding on the cover of the Nov. 10th issue, out Oct. 10th, will be closed Nov. 10th. Minimum bid, ten dollars. All covers will be sent to the highest bidders express collect. In case two or more bidders offer the same amount for one cover it will go to the bid first received.—A. S. H.

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Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

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These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

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If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

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The Boston Magazine Exchange, 24 T Wharf, Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL BUY: Copy containing "Riley Grannan's Last Adventure—and After," which appeared in January, 1912, and Mid-August, 1910, or clipping of same; fifty cents.—Address C. H. HORNBECK, Centerville Journal, Centerville, South Dakota.

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When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

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Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the second issue of each month. Address letters regarding stations to J. Cox.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

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(*See Lost Trails*)

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(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters
Beriah Brown, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
Captain A. E. Dingle, care *Adventure*. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
Harry E. Rieseberg, Apt. 347-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

4. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits
Captain A. E. Dingle, care *Adventure*. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*See next section.*)

5. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups
Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

6. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
Tom L. Mills, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage ten cents.*)

7. ★ South Sea Islands Part 2 French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn).
Charles Brown, Jr., Papeete, Tahiti, Society Island, South Pacific Ocean. Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture. (*Postage ten cents.*)

8. ★ Australia and Tasmania
Phillip Norman, 842 Military Rd., Mosman, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage ten cents.*)

9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
Fay-Cooper Cole, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

10. ★ New Guinea
L. P. B. Armit, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered. (*Postage ten cents*).

11. Philippine Islands.
Buck Connor, L. B. 4, Quartzsite, Ariz. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

12. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. Halton, 1402 Lytton Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

13. Japan
Grace P. T. Knudson, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with ten cents in stamps NOT attached*)

14. Asia Part 1 Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo
Captain Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.* Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

15. Asia Part 2 Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan
Gordon MacCreagh, 21 East 14th St., New York. Hunting, trading, traveling, customs.

16. Asia Part 3 Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters
Captain C. L. Oliver, care *Adventure.* Natives, language, mining, trading, customs, climate. Arctic Ocean: Winds, currents, depths, ice conditions, walrus-hunting.

17. Asia Part 4 North China, Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan
George W. Twomey, M. D., 41 Rue de France, Tientsin, China. Natives, languages, trading, customs, climate and hunting.

18. Africa Part 1 Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria
Robert Simpson, care *Adventure.* Labor, trade, expenses, outfitting, living conditions, tribal customs, transportation.

19. ✠ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
Charles Beadle, care Agence Cook et Fils, Nice, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport.

20. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
Captain F. J. Franklin, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

21. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. Waring, Corunna, Ont., Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

22. Africa Part 5 Morocco
George E. Holt, care *Adventure.* Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

23. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
Captain Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.* Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

24. Africa Part 7 Egypt, Tunis, Algeria
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

25. Africa Part 8 Sudan
W. T. Moffat, 67 Burlington Road, Fulham, London, S.W. 6, England. Climate, prospects, trading, traveling, customs, history.

26. Turkey
J. F. Edwards, David Lane, East Hampton, N. Y. Travel, history, geography, politics, races, languages, customs, commerce, outdoor life, general information.

27. Asia Minor
(Editor to be appointed.)

28. Bulgaria, Roumania
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

29. Albania
Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

30. Jugo-Slavia and Greece
Lieut. William Jenna, Plattsburg Barracks, New York. History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel, outdoor life.

31. Scandinavia
Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

32. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
Fred F. Fleischer, care *Adventure.* History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

33. Great Britain
Thomas Bowen Partington, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England. General information.

34. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
Edgar Young, care *Adventure.* Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

35. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil
William R. Barbour, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

36. South America Part 3 Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay
William R. Barbour, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information. Questions regarding employment not answered.

37. Central America
Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

38. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

39. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. Mahaffey, care of Roadmaster, S. P. Co., San José, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

40. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except Strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

41. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

42. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario
A. D. L. Robinson, 173 Maple Ave., Pembroke, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

43. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District
T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

44. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
(Editor to be appointed.) Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

45. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin
Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

46. ✠ Canada Part 7 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec
Jas. F. B. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

47. Alaska
Theodore S. Solomons, Larkspur, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

48. Baffinland and Greenland
Victor Shaw, Ketchikan, Alaska. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

49. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

50. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico
H. F. Robinson, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance, oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.

51. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
Frank Middleton, 509 Frémont St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

52. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.
Chester C. Davis, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with three cents in stamps NOT attached.*)

53. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country
R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, history and inhabitants.

54. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

55. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
Joseph Mills Hanson (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure.* Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

56. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure.* Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

57. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure.* Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

58. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
Geo. A. Zerr, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

59. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks
Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, Calif. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

60. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers
Howard A. Shannon, care *Adventure.* Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

61. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville
Howard A. Shannon, care *Adventure.* Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

62. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians
William R. Barbour, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Allgehanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

63. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala. Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
Hapsburg Liebe, Box 432, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

64. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St., Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

A.—Radio

Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

Victor Shaw, Ketchikan, Alaska. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. Gordon, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—**All Shotguns,** including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure.*

2.—**All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers,** including foreign and American makes. Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—**Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800.** Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. Lewis Appleton Barker, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure.* Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Forestry in the United States

Ernest W. Shaw, South Carver, Mass. Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild-animal life in the forests.

G.—Tropical Forestry

William R. Barbour, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

H.—Aviation

Lieut.-Col. W. G. Schauffler, Jr., 2940 Newark St. N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

I.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

Fred. F. Fleischer, care *Adventure.* *United States:* Military history, Military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general, "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

J.—American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

Arthur Woodward, 217 W. 125th St., New York. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

K.—First Aid on the Trail

Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb. Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake-bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazards of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.

L.—Health-Building Outdoors

Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb. How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. Tropical hygiene. General health-building, safe exercise, right food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.

M.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write J. Cox, care *Adventure.*

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash, D. C., **for catalog** of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries,** the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico,** and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti**, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska**, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii**, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. **Also**, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba**, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union **for general information** on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. **Address** L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.**, Commissioner Royal Canadian **Mounted** Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British **subjects, age** 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **Canal Zone**, the Panama Canal Com., **Wash., D. C.**

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. **Fred H.** Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. **MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas.**, Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National parks, how to get there and what **to do** when there. Address National Park **Service, Washington, D. C.**

A Correction

HERE are a couple of letters—one from a member of our writers' brigade, the other from an "A. A." expert, the accuracy of whose work has never been called into question before:

Asheville, N. C.

Several gentlemen in Asheville who must read their *Adventure* pretty closely have called my attention to an "A. A." answer given by Mr. Barbour to William Brown of New York regarding a tramping tour in the Blue Ridge and Smokies. It was in the issue of May 30, 1924.

Most of it was all right, but there were several points of error in regard to the Asheville plateau region at the present time. Mr. Barbour must have been thinking of years agone when he said there was "a logging road up Mt. Mitchell." There is, in fact, one of the most beautiful and easily traversed motor roads in America nearly to the top. Also apart from this hard surface road from Asheville, more than half of which is a boulevard, there is the beautiful trail up Big Ivy from the southwest which a pedestrian might prefer.

The State of North Carolina has a park on top of Mitchell for motor tourists, and there is a fine hotel at Camp Alice as well.

Also Mr. Barbour errs when he says there is a question about "Mitchell being the highest peak of the Appalachian ranges." He mentions Clingman's Dome as possibly a rival.

Now Colonel Joseph Hyde Pratt, formerly State engineer, and Mr. Leslie Jones, director of the U. S. Geodetic Survey, after complete computations say that Mitchell, at 6,711 feet, is the highest peak in America east of the Rockies.

These gentlemen and others will be glad if *Adventure* will note these corrections.

Mr. Barbour is right about starting any such trip, either tramping, by horse or motor—from Asheville. Any part of the Smoky or Blue Ridge ranges is best reached *via* the fine hard roads which penetrate from here to any of the wilder regions.

And as for climate! I wore an overcoat last night! There are not five nights all summer here as hot as you'll have it, week after week, in any Northern city. Blankets every dawn, sure as shooting. Cold, rushing rivers, green-robed peaks. lovely valleys.—CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON.

A copy of Mr. Jackson's letter was sent to Mr. Barbour, who replied as follows:

New York.

The logging road up Mt. Mitchell was still in operation when I was last there about four years ago. I did not know that it had been abandoned. The motor road too must have been extended since I was there.

The supremacy of Mt. Mitchell as the highest peak in the East has been in dispute for several generations. There is apparently no question that Mt. Mitchell is 6,711 feet, for it has been accurately surveyed.

Clingman's Dome in the Smokies has not been so accurately surveyed, or had not been the last I knew. People around Knoxville still claim it to be higher. One rather rough triangulation gave the figure 6,666 feet, or forty-five feet lower than Mt. Mitchell. Mt. Guyot and Le Conte in the Smokies are about the same height as Clingman's Dome, whatever that may be. Personally I believe Mt. Mitchell is the highest, but many people still question it.

Mr. Jackson is certainly right in all he says about climate and scenery.—WM. R. BARBOUR.

The full statement of the sections in this department as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Big-Game Hunting in South Africa

"TOM TIDDLER," the character to whom reference is made below by Captain Franklin, is the discoverer of some wonderful gold-field, with nuggets as big as footballs, that neither he nor any one else could ever find again:

Question:—"A friend of mine and myself are thinking of a trip around the world and stopping at Mombasa to arrange for a short trip lion-hunting in the Lake Victoria Nyanza District. We would like to get some information as to how much a two or three months' trip would cost, and get hold of a map, etc. We have guns and ammunition and some equipment. How much is the hunting license, if any is needed for lion, as we do not care about anything else?"—THEO. S. JEWETT, Laconia, N. H.

Answer, by Capt. Franklin:—You will notice that I do not cover the Victoria Nyanza district in my territory for *Adventure* magazine. I am, however, writing you to urge you not to hunt from Mombasa. This territory is a kind of "Tom Tiddler's ground" these days. There are a great number of hunting-expeditions from Mombasa. Licenses are very expensive; so are your carriers.

I would strongly advise you to come down from Mombasa to Beira in Portuguese East Africa and there hunt for lions, rhino, buffalo, etc., on a schedule which I shall be very pleased to furnish you. The cost would be one-fifth of the cost in the Victoria Nyanza district, and you would have a better time.

I shall be only too pleased to give you the fullest information on this should you desire it, and can give you the names of the guides, etc.

I enclose a few pictures of this country which please be sure to return to me as they are part of a set. I can route you through this country where you will have the time of your life at very little expense.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

Indian Dances

ESPECIALLY the sun dance:

Question:—"I am very anxious to obtain some information regarding the dances of the North American Indian, and the dress worn by them in any of the dances which you happen to know of. Also any legends which pertain to the subject."—LOUIS S. DE MARTELLY, Kansas City, Mo.

Answer, by Mr. Woodward:—In your questions regarding the dances of the North American Indian you have indicated in a vague way that there are dances performed by the Indians. You are perfectly right in that assumption. However, you have not been as specific as I would like and so am rather at a loss to tell to what tribe you refer. "Indians of North America" is a pretty generous phrase. I am not certain whether you want an outline of a *katcina* dance of the Tusayan region or the sun dance of the plains Indian.

In general, the Indians danced for various reasons—for joy, sorrow, in triumph, in religious ecstasy, enacting a legend, for war, to bring the buffalo, to worship the sun in thankfulness for mercies received and for many other reasons which might seem absurd to a white man's way of thinking. The costumes worn at these dances naturally differed with the nature of the ceremony and also with the tribe that had that particular dance.

As to the legends, well, I could give you many legends; but I should not have room on paper to relate them. Each tribe had its legends. Some tales are found among all of the Indians in one form or another. Legends of creation gave rise ot the dances among the Indians of the Southwest.

Among the Dakotas the sun dance was performed during the Summer months, as indeed it was among all of the principal plains tribes, and was held as Summer solstice ceremony, being considered one of the greatest dances of the plains tribes.

At these dances the divisions of the tribe gathered from all part sof the hunting-territory. Invitations were extended to neighboring people, and the dance was attended by numerous other minor ceremonies. Treaties were made, old alliances renewed, enmities smoothed over and trade carried on. In short, aside from the religious significance of the event, the sun dance took on the general aspect of a combined revival meeting and country fair.

In some cases the dance was given by an individual who perhaps during the Winter had suffered from some malady and upon recovering vowed to the sun that he would give a dance in honor of the intervention of the sun or "great mystery."

Accordingly the word was passed around, the great sun-dance lodge erected with intricate ceremonies, various rites of purification and fasting gone through with while offerings to the sun in the form of the dancer's tortured bodies were voluntarily made by the devotess of the dance. These young men had incisions made through the flesh on either their shoulders or breasts; thongs were passed through these bloody holes and attached to the sun-dance pole in the center of the logde. Around this pole they danced, blowing on whistles made of the wing-bones of eagles. Relations wishing to honor the candidates threw blankets, garments, beads, robes and all manner of articles over the line attached by skewers and thongs to the flesh of the victim.

These gifts were later distributed among the poor of the tribe and the donor was praised accordingly. The physical torture is carried to the point of absolute exhaustion on the part of the dancer. Cases have been cited where the victim fainted and hung from his thongs, unable to break through his flesh, by his own weight, in which case his nearest relative, taking pity on him, tugged at the rawhide rope, thereby causing it to tear through the flesh. The scarifications were badges of honor.

During the dance the men allowed the hair to flow loosely down the back. Some wore as head-dresses caps of buffalo hide with horns; others wore their war-bonnets of eagle feathers and buffalo robes.

A full description of the sun dance may be obtained from the Eleventh Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, which you may no doubt obtain in your public library or possibly at the library of the nearest museum. Descriptions of other dances may be had from the "Hand-Book of the American Indian, Volume 2." Legends relating to the various dances and ceremonies may be had in "Myths and Legends of the North American Indian," by Lew Spence.

Perhaps if you get hold of one of these books you can get a much clearer idea of the dances than I am able to give you in such a limited space. Read some of George Bird Grinnell's books on the plains Indians. He is perhaps the best authority in the United States on the northern plains tribes, especially the Cheyennes. His "Blackfoot Lodge Tales," "The Fighting Cheyennes," "Pawnee Hero Tales" and others of a smiliar nature are highly interesting.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

The White Shark of the Caribbean

ONLY one danger of a cruise which both inquirer and "A. A." man agree is "harebrained:"

Question:—"Have read with much interest of various cruises in small sailboats, and as I (with two *amigos*) am contemplating such a trip, am applying to you for expert information on the subject. The dope-sheet is as follows·

Boat: King canvas folding; length, 18 ft.; beam, 4 ft.; depth, 2 ft., 1 in.; weight, 120 lbs.; capacity, 1500 lbs.; rig, sloop.

Personnel: One skipper (myself) seven years in U. S. N., both old and new; can handle a sailboat fairly well; have a working knowledge of Spanish, a strong sense of humor that has 'saved my face' (figuratively and *physically*) many times, have 'roughed it' quite a bit and just now have a severe attack of *Wanderlust*.

Crew: One foremast hand, an ex-apprentice in the Navy; can hand, reef and steer; is of Chilean descent and in case of trouble with the *hombres* ashore would be invaluable as interpreter.

One combination steward, supercargo, 'Jack-'o'-the Dust,' etc., etc.; does not know the flying jib-boom from the rudder, but is young, full of pep, a good cook, can make swell bread, biscuit and flap-jacks, believes in his own greatness as a chef and proclaims it loud and long, as the following will show:

Was talking with my 'crew' about the coming cruise and happened to mention that if everything went well we would soon be in the land of galapagos and then said to him—

'Say, chef, in case we catch one of them, how are you on soup, steaks and roasts with it?'

His reply was—

'Say, boy, I can cook anything that grows horns or hair, so bring on your —— *gallopers* and I will sure show you something fancy.'

I did not tell him a galapagos had neither the one or the other, so am joyfully awaiting the moment when he sees a 500-pound turtle for the first time.

TO GET back to business: The itinerary briefly would be about as follows:

Leave San Diego, Calif., about Aug. 1st, down Lower Calif. coast to Cape San Lucas, over to Mazatlan, down Mexican coast to Corinto, Nicaragua; thence by rail (hence the folding boat) to Lake Managua *via* Leon; L. Managua to L. Nicaragua, to San Juan River, down it to Greytown, up coast to Yucatan, thus avoiding the dreaded Mosquito Coast; across Yucatan Channel to Cuba, to Haiti, San Domingo, Porto Rico, Leeward Isles, Windward Isles, Trinidad, thence west along Venezuela coast to Canal, through it and up coast to home.

A large order for 'three men in a boat,' I'll admit; but there are several factors in our favor, *viz:*

The boat will have air chambers bow and stern, 6-ft. air tubes outside fore and aft below gunwales, adding greatly to buoyancy; it can be folded into two packages and shipped as baggage; it has light draft (12 to 15 inches), and in case of a forced landing we could pick her up and carry her out of the reach of the breakers, whereas a wooden boat would go to pieces. We will hug the shore closely at all times, will have a good barometer, and on the least sign of a 'blow' will hit the beach, haul her up and 'ride her out' on land. Again, as time is no object speed is not essential, and safety first will be our motto.

We will put in more time ashore than afloat, for our idea is to go up many rivers into the mountains, pitch camp and hunt and fish for a week or two at a time. Will be out of sight of land twice only—C. San Lucas to Mazatlan; Yucatan to Cuba—and we most likely can get a tow over from San Lucas to mainland. Yucatan Channel is only ninety miles across, and we ought to make it in thirty hours at the most. Will have a 7 x 9 waterproof ridge tent, rigged so it can be used as a boat awning, and set up ashore in camp.

Will not trouble you with queries as to commissary, medicines, tackle and arms, as from data at hand I have a good idea of what is necessary. I have *Adventure* complete for '20, '21, '22, so I went through every one and from 'A.A.' secured much valuable information relating to the countries to be visited, much of it from you.

Well, Mr. Emerson, so far this effusion is nothing but explanatory, so now for the information desired:

1. Does the R.R. run clear through from Corinto to Lake Managua *via* Leon? A friend here told me he had once gone up from Corinto to Leon and returned by rail, but did not know whether the R.R. went on to the lake.

2. Is the river connecting the two lakes (Managua and Nicaragua) navigable for our light-draft boat?

3. Is the San Juan River navigable and clear of falls and rapids from lake to sea?

4. Can we go by boat from coast up to Lake Izabal (Gulf of Dulce) Guatemala, for it sure must be a sweet place to visit, if the name counts for anything?

5. Where can I get copies of Edgar Young's books on interior of Central America? Am going to write to Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C., for their dope, also for Rand, McNally's pocket map, but will get larger and better maps later on.

6. Though outside your section, will you kindly answer this question, as you 'A.A.' people, individually and collectively, surely know the earth and all the wonders thereof:

What is the set of the current in Yucatan Channel, north or south? In what direction are the prevailing winds of the West Indies, say from January on? Would it not be better for us to take the leeward, or south side, of Cuba, etc., clear down to Trinidad, not only to save distance but from a safety point of view?

WELL, Mr. Emerson, the above queries cover the field of information desired, and this letter as a whole is in the nature of a confidential correspondence; but if you wish to use any part of it in 'A.A.' it is O.K. with me with the proviso that you do not publish my full name (just initials) and no address. Not that I am ashamed of it, but I would be pestered with 1,000 questions per day before sailing-time.

I am forty-seven years old (just a young feller struggling to get along), seven years in Navy, two years in Army (Spanish-Am. War) and troubled from boyhood with 'itching feet.' Have a bad attack of it right now, hence this hair-brained cruise. But you know how it is, Mr. Emerson—no cure for it only to pack up the old duffel-bag and beat it."—D. L. C.

Answer, by Mr. Emerson:—Your letter received, also the sketch and illustrations, all very interesting, and I can picture said canoe riding the gentle waves of some nice inland lake; *but* my personal experiences with small craft in tropical waters would lead me to think as much as twice before I would attempt to scout the southern shores of Cuba, Jamaica and Santo Domingo in such a nice little craft as you have shown me. The principal reason is the very often seen white shark of those waters; his teeth would not know they were ripping canvas or boat ribs.

This —— gets to be thirty-five feet long and weighs two thousand pounds. He is called white, but he is really gray in color on the back, although white enough underneath. His head is large, and when he opens his mouth, to speak mildly, it is enormous. His body is stout, and his teeth are the most perfect ripping-apparatus that a human being ever looked at, and he can snap a man's body in two pieces at a single bite. This fellow is the true man-eating shark, and in some cases when he has been cut open a bull's head with horns complete has been found in his stomach.

This—— will follow you day and night after you have thrown over your first garbage; you will see that triangular fin just above the surface until it gets on your nerves. We got one on a big hook with a piece of salt pork and hoisted him on to the deckload of lumber on a schooner, and his odor was so bad that he was got overboard, giving him the hook and twenty feet of line as a present, and the deckload smelled to high heaven of him until I was able to get on to land, and even then the thought of that smell interfered with my meals for ten days. This gentleman (?) has a very keen sense of smell, and will follow his hoped-for prey untiringly.

As to your rig; it is complete and fine in every way with the exception that with an outrigger added you could not be tipped over; which same I would think, was worth taking into serious consideration. Safety first!

NOW answering your questions in order:

1. At the port of Corinto you take train for Managua and stop over at Leon, which city is larger than Managua (the capital).
2. Lake Nicaragua is 92 miles long by 34 miles wide. Lake Managua, not far distant, is 32 miles long and 16 miles wide, and the two lakes are connected by the river Tipitapa. Both lakes are same level, being 135 feet elevation above sea-level, so you will find no obstruction to your trip; and as I am much interested in this trip, you might write me the sensations pervading your system when you pass through the Tipitapa River.
3. Steamers ply that river; it is part of the much hoped-for Nicaragua Canal so much yearned for by the inhabitants of that country. This route for a canal would utilize Lake Nicaragua and the San Juan River, which as you can see by map, flows east from the lake to the Caribbean Sea. Get a Rand, McNally's Pocket Map of Central America.
4. The only navigable river of Guatemala is Rio Dulce, and only for launches and small craft.
5. Enclosed you will find some of Edgar Young's monographs, and others, which you will enjoy reading.
6. Ask Captain Dingle, care of *Adventure;* he knows all the currents, winds, depths, etc., of the oceans.

You mention "hair-brained cruise," and I certainly agree with you on the special name you have given it.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose FULL return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

The Greely Expedition

SOURCE-BOOKS dealing with the work of a group of Arctic explorers who made history:

Question:—"Please will you give me information where I can get a book about the Greely Expedition in 1881-83. My uncle, Nick Saler, was a member of this expedition. I am over here in U. S. A. only three years now and I'd like to know more about this. All I know is what my mother told me, that one of my uncles was in the U. S. Army and went to the North Pole but never came back."—CONSTANT SCHMIT, Iron Mountain, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. Shaw:—There are two books which give the data you want. One is that published by Gen. Adolphus W. Greely himself, called, "Three Years of Arctic Service;" the other, by Admiral Schley, is "Rescue of Greely."

I was with the Peary Exp. of 1899, and we visited Cape Sabine and Cocked Hat Island, where the Greely party were found and rescued by Schley in the *Thetis*. No one had been there meanwhile until we arrived, and we found things in practically the same shape as when left some seventeen years previous.

I do not recall the list of the members of Greely's party but think there were about thirty-six, and seven were saved: Brainard, Beiderbick, Long, Greely himself and, I think, Lockwood and two others. I knew Long and Beiderbick well in New York, where we were all members of the Arctic Club, and had more or less correspondence with Gen. Greely, head of the Government Bureau of Meteorology.

Schley's account of the rescue gives the names of the party and details of the voyage of the *Thetis;* Greely's book of course gives intimate details of the expedition, with account of the two years at Fort Conger, his headquarters about two hundred miles north of Cape Sabine, in Robeson Channel.

You can get these books at any good public library, or probably of Brentano's book-store, New York City. Get your local book-store to write to Brentano's, if it doesn't keep them. They may be out of print, in which case you'd have to comb the second-hand book-stores. But you can find copies in public libraries without doubt.

Tahiti and Moorea

INCOMPARABLE islands; and lidless:

Question:—"I have had twenty years of railroad work and am tired of it, and thought a year spent down in the South Sea Islands would do me good; and if I like it well enough there and can place my money to advantage I might remain longer.

My capital is small—$5,000—but large enough for a start if placed in a safe, sensible investment to yield a moderate income sufficient to get by on. It occurred to me that a man of your experience could give me some good advice. If you think I should give up the idea and stick to railroad work, don't hesitate to say so. Hard, plain talk is what I like.

Which of the islands do you like best, and why? What are the chief characteristics of the whites and natives? Do North Americans grow tired of the tropics and become discontented to such an extent that they are no longer satisfied until they return home?

Now it is not my desire to get rich quick—I know enough to realize this kind of thing is not done very often—just to build up a moderate income would be sufficient. If this can't be done, I would just take a thousand with me and loaf around until it was gone and then back to the old grind.

Any advice you give me will be appreciated. I am thirty-nine years old and unmarried. Can produce credentials of character and reliability from the highest of railroad officials."—JAS. T. HOELL, San Francisco, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. C. Brown, Jr.—I like the tone of your letter so much that I am going to do as you have suggested; I am going to give you some "hard, plain talk." Now let's go.

Tahiti and Moorea, two uncomparable islands away down in the Society Group, are the places that I like best. These islands are beautiful beyond any description that I might attempt to squeeze into a letter of this size. Too, living is inexpensive; that is, when compared with what we are soaked for it in these brick-and-dust cities of ours. Again life is easy out in those equatorial lands, with the lid off everywhere.

Frederick O'Brien writes of Tahiti and Moorea life in "Mystic Isles of the South Seas," while "Tahiti Days," by Hector MacQuarrie, is a faithful picture of the mountain peaks, brown men and women, blue lagoons and merry parties that make up this "Paris of the South Pacific."

Some men have made fortunes out in French Oceania, and others are living well on the moderate incomes derived from coconut and vanilla plantations. Indeed, the majority of these men started with only a few thousand dollars. In some instances they did not have as much money as you.

Good coconut and vanilla land can be bought in Tahiti and Moorea. Because of the demoralized condition of the French exchange, one should be able to purchase a good piece of land for about $100 American. But he should make sure that there is a clear title that goes for it.

Your idea of running down and looking things over for a year is a good one. Six months will tell you all you want to know, I am sure. More, you'll meet some North Americans that have no desire to live anywhere but out in the warm blue waters of French Oceania.

Write to Hind, Rolph & Co., General Agents, 230 California St., San Francisco, for rates and sailings to Tahiti.

Wants Hawaiian Butterflies

A CHANCE for collectors to exchange specimens:

Question:—"I am interested in collecting butterflies and I would like to know if you could tell me of some one in the Hawaiian Islands who would be willing to trade specimens with me."—H. D. WRIGHT.

Answer, by Mr. Halton:—I suggest that you write to Mr. Garrett P. Wilder, Honolulu, who is one of the foremost naturalists in the Islands, and he can probably put you in touch with some collector.

The Chatham Islands

WHERE the black-swan shooting is good:

Question:—"I would like to know as much as you can tell me about the Chatham Islands.

Is there homestead land to be got there; that is, free Government land?

Just how much land can be homesteaded in New Zealand?

What sum of money must an immigrant have in order to enter the country?

What would wild land cost in the Chathams?

What connections are there as regards boats between there and the mainland, and what is the distance?

Are there any auto roads in the islands?

Would there be any duty to pay on a second-hand Ford car?

Any other information that I can get as regards population, fertility of soil, crops, etc., would be greatly appreciated."—ED. MILLS, Hovland, Minn.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—How on earth did you come to pick on the Chatham Islands, of all the spots on this footstool, for a possible abiding place? I can tell you something about the group, but would also warn you off those same premises. It is an outlying group, 414 miles E. S. E. of New Zealand, about midships, comprising two principal islands and two unimportant islets.

The largest island contains about 222,490 acres, about 45,960 acres being covered by a lagoon or lake. Then about a quarter of the rest of the surface is covered by forest or bush, leaving the rest covered with grass or fern—the latter an indication of poor land.

The land is practically given over to the pasturing of sheep, the wool from which is sent to New Zealand, steamer calling about every two months. The fishing-grounds are so good that there are three freezing-factories for export. There is a radio station for keeping in touch with New Zealand, to which the islands belong.

It is hoped to develop the tourist traffic during the Summer, for the Chathams are quietude idealized. The shooting is good, black swans abounding on the lagoon. The traveling on the island is done on horseback—which rather rules your Ford out of it.

If you had cash in hand you could certainly induce some of the early settlers to sell out. I don't think you could get a holding otherwise. Can't tell you anything about values or prices.

There are two hotels there for the use of visitors—and you might enjoy a spying-out of the land. In the Summer season—which is from November right along to March—there may be a weekly steamer service from New Zealand to the Chathams.

There is no free Government land. It is owned by the inhabitants. It is difficult to day to get homesteading land in New Zealand, and the free hold price is high. You must have at least $500 in your pouch.

I think that about gets your bunch of queries in general terms. If I have succeeded in warning you off the Chathams, then you don't know how thankful you would be in five years' time.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

THE War Department has in its possession thirteen decorations awarded former members of the United States Army for World War Services. Ten of the decorations remain undelivered because the persons to whom awarded can not be located and three, which were posthumous awards, are undelivered because of no known relatives:

CARLIN, HARRY, No. 12830, private, first class, Medical Detachment, Base Hospital No. 86. Awarded French *Médaille d'Honneur des Epidemies.* Residence at time of enlistment and time of discharge, 300 Fourth Avenue, Detroit, Mich. (new number 2236 Fourth Avenue). Emergency address: Mrs. Norris, friend, same address.

CARTONA, CHARLES, No. 65624, private, Company I, 102nd Infantry, 26th Division. Awarded Distinguished-Service Cross April 2, 1919, by the Commanding General, A. E. F. Residence at time of enlistment: Beach Avenue, Terryville, Conn. Address at time of discharge: New Haven, Conn. Later address: 232 Orange Street, Waterbury, Conn. Emergency address: Mrs. Sophie Cartona, Toring Street, Egumin, Mensk, Russia.

CLINE, FLOYD, No. 541122, private, Company C, 7th Infantry, 3rd Division. Awarded Distinguished-Service Cross by the War Department February 17, 1923. Residence at time of enlistment: Pineville, W. Va. Residence at time of discharge, Crown, W. Va. Emergency address: Mrs. Louisa Cline, wife, Uno, W. Va.

DOBES, OTKA PETER, captain, Ambulance Service. Awarded French *Médaille d'Honneur des Epidemies.* Residence at time of appointment: 12 Rue Gravel, Levallois near Paris, Seine, France. Emergency address: Madame O. P. Dobes, wife, same address. Address given at time of discharge, 12 Rue Gravel, Levallois near Paris, France, and Variety Publishing Company, New York, N. Y.

IRONS, JOHN K., No. 736749, corporal, Company K, 11th Infantry, 5th Division. Awarded French *Croix de Guerre* with gilt star. Residence at time of enlistment: 524 Franklin Avenue, Steubenville, Ohio. Emergency address: Mrs. Harry Crawley, sister, 317 16th Street, Monaca, Pa. Address at time of discharge, 524 Franklin Avenue, Steubenville, Ohio.

LUNSFORD, EMMET E., private, Company A, 31st Infantry. Awarded Distinguished-Service Cross by the Commanding General, American Forces in Siberia, October 25, 1919. Residence at time of enlistment: General Delivery, Claremore, Okla. Emergency address: William Lunsford, father, RFD No. 3, Box 86, Claremore, Okla.

O'CONNOR, JAMES, No. 91120, corporal, Company I, 165th Infantry, 42nd Division. Awarded Italian *Croce di Guerra.* Residence at time of enlistment: 320 Ninth Avenue, New York, N. Y. Emergency address: Patrick O'Connor, father, Parish of Arnogh, County Clare, Ireland. Address given at time of discharge, 320 Ninth Avenue, New York, N. Y. Later address given as Hotel Asbestos, Manville, N. J.

POLLAN, CLAYTON R., captain, Section 537, Ambulance Service. Awarded French *Médaille d'Honneur des Epidemies.* Residence at time of enlistment: 220 May Avenue, Ft. Smith, Ark. Emergency address: N. R. Pollan, father, same address.

RUHL, LUTHER, No. 43057, sergeant, Company F, 16th Infantry, 1st Division. Awarded Distinguished-Service Cross by the War Department May 19, 1920. Residence at time of enlistment: Hugo, Okla. Emergency address: Mrs. Gladys Dean, sister, Cooper, Texas. Address given at time of discharge as McAlester, Okla.

WEST, CHESTER H., first sergeant, Company D, 363rd Infantry, 91st Division. Awarded Italian *Croce di Guerra.* Residence at enlistment: Merced, California. Residence at registration: Los Banos, Merced Co., California. Emergency address: Mrs. E. H. Thornton, mother, Idaho Falls, Idaho. Later address: Poso Farm, Firebaugh, Fresno Co., California.

ARKMAN, FRANK, No. 1429432, private, Company L, 305th Infantry, 77th Division. Awarded Distinguished-Service Cross by the Commanding General, A. E. F., March 28, 1919 (Posthumous award). Residence at time of enlistment: Bellingham, Minn. Reason for non-delivery: No known relative.

CARTER, CARL C., No. 540595, sergeant, Company A, 7th Infantry, 3rd Division. Awarded Distinguished-Service Cross by the War Department February 17, 1920 (Posthumous award). Residence at time of enlistment: Fresno, California. Reason for non-delivery: No known relative.

MASON, EDWARD G., No. 757108, first sergeant, Company D, 55th Infantry, 7th Division. Posthumously awarded the Distinguished-Service Cross by the Commanding General, A. E. F., January 10, 1919. Residence at time of enlistment: Detroit, Mich. Emergency address: John J. Mason, Toledo, Ohio. Reason for non-delivery: Can not locate any relative.

Any information which will assist the War Department in delivering these decorations to the proper persons should be addressed to The Adjutant General, War Department, Washington, D. C.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

ALBERT, LOUIS U. Born in New Brunswick, Canada. Any information as to the whereabouts of his brothers and sisters will be appreciated.—Address Private Clarence U. Albert, Co. C, 3rd Engineers, Schofield Barracks, H. T.

MAYO, BENJAMIN. Last heard of in Boston, Mass. in 1895; was a surgeon. His adopted son, George Mayo, would like information to the whereabouts of himself or of his wife, Cora Mayo.—Address George Mayo, Edward Hines Jr. Hospital, Maywood, Ill.

C. O. M. Have been trying to reach you in many ways. We are so anxious to hear more from you. Please write at once. Everything is now O. K.—Address M. A. M.

V. M. TEX. Get in touch with your brother Paul. Am worried.—Address Gen. Delivery, Cleveland, Ohio.

McELLIGOTT, EVA MARGORY. Daughter of James Joseph and Ellen Grace McElligott. Age twenty-seven years. At three years of age went to reside with a Mrs. William Brown at Ottawa, Canada, afterward moving to Parry Sound, Canada. Any information will be appreciated.—Address G. McE. care of *Adventure.*

CROSBY, J. H. You have made a terrible mistake. If you love me go back and clear your name. I have learned from Naval authorities that you will be considered merely A. W. O. L. The sorrow of having you captured is more than I can bear. Report to any police chief or Naval authority in the country now, while your offense is minor, and make me happy. Write to me at once.—Mother.

SANDS, MRS. ALICE N. Alice, will do anything you wish if you will return.—Maurice.

NOBLE, WILLIAM NATHAN. Left Goliad County in August, 1898. Height five feet, eleven inches, weight two hundred and ten pounds. Light complexion, blue eyes, brown hair. Went to South America. Any information will be appreciated.—Address HUSON & HUSON, 215 W. Commerce St., San Antonio, Texas.

CLASSICK, PAUL H. Last heard of in Miami, Fla. Please write to an old friend. Am sorry about the trouble I caused.—Address JACK GILLETTE, 30 N. 4th St., Newark, N. J.

WATKINS, THOMAS. About eighty years ago left his home in Milwaukee, Wis. and came to Toronto. His father was the owner of the Blackamore Hotel. Thomas died a year after his marriage in Toronto. He had brothers, Dr. Alfred and Henry, and a sister Eliza. Their children or any one who knew of this family should write, as the only daughter of Thomas Watkins would like to locate her father's family.—Address DR. A. E. BYERLY, 29 Gummer Bldg., Guelph, Ont., Can.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

DEAN, MAMIE. Last heard of in New Brunswick, Canada. Was in Boston, Mass. in 1895. She is my mother. I was born in the MacLean Street Hospital, Boston, Mass. I was adopted by Benjamin Mayo, a surgeon and he handed me over to the State Board of Charities of Massachusetts. I was named Arthur Dean, but afterward went under name of George Mayo. Any information will be appreciated.—Address GEORGE MAYO, Edward Hines Jr. Hospital, Maywood, Ill.

WILL the man who was our guest in Cherokee County, Texas, in March, 1923, and who claimed to be one of the Dalton brothers, please correspond, and reach for the latch-string when passing this way?—Address G. W. BARRINGTON, 1119 South Waverly Drive, Dallas, Texas.

PLUMTREE, ARTHUR SAWYER. Left Toronto, Ont. April, 1897. Reached Rossland, B. C., April 21, 1897. Frequent letters until April 10, 1900. May be in or near Phoenix, Ariz. Last description March, 1900—five feet nine inches, weight one hundred and seventy-five pounds. About twenty-one years of age. Refers to many occupations: cooking, shoveling, driving team, etc. Father and sisters are anxious to hear from him.—Address MRS. GERTRUDE E. ROLLINGS, Apt. 217, 49 Highland Ave., Highland Park, Mich.

ROJEWSKI, TEDDY. Believed to be in the U. S. Marine Corps. Your pal waiting for news from you. Am at home.—Address WALTER BOGDAN, JR., 4103 S. Sacramento Ave., Chicago, Ill.

HENRY, JAMES. A carpenter by trade. Left Scotland in 1854. Went to Australia. Last heard from in 1874 in Nielson, New Zealand. If still living would like to hear and get in touch with him or any of his descendants.—Address JAMES T. DICKSON, 309 Beaver St., East Liverpool, Ohio.

ATKINSON, FINLEY. Last heard of in St. Louis, Mo. Baby dead. Please write at once.—KATHLEEN.

THE following have been inquired for in either the September 20 or October 10, 1924, issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine.

EAMS, RALPH; Edmund, K. B.; Ewart; Gibbs, William H.; Hankey, Edward A.; Hoffman, William; Hoste, Hickman; Howell, James Edgar; Hubbard, William Augustus; Larrett, Henry; McKelberg, A. J.; Murphy, George; Newton, Lucy Caroline, Miss and father; Phillips, Fred Dillard; Smits, Fred H.; Stringfellow, Harry and Jesse; Wojeik, Mrs. Catherine Schilling.

MAIL—Van Tassel, Harry.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

NOVEMBER 10TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete narrative poem**, the **complete novel** and the **complete novelette** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

WHITE CHALLENGE — ***Royce Brier***
Melvin found wealth, and other things, in the desert.

PEASANT WIT — ***Nevil Henshaw***
"The Savage" comes to the lonely farm.

OM Part IV — ***Talbot Mundy***
The lama leads the way to Darjiling.

THE PRIMITIVE METHOD — ***F. R. Buckley***
"Ah'm a just mon," said the chief engineer.

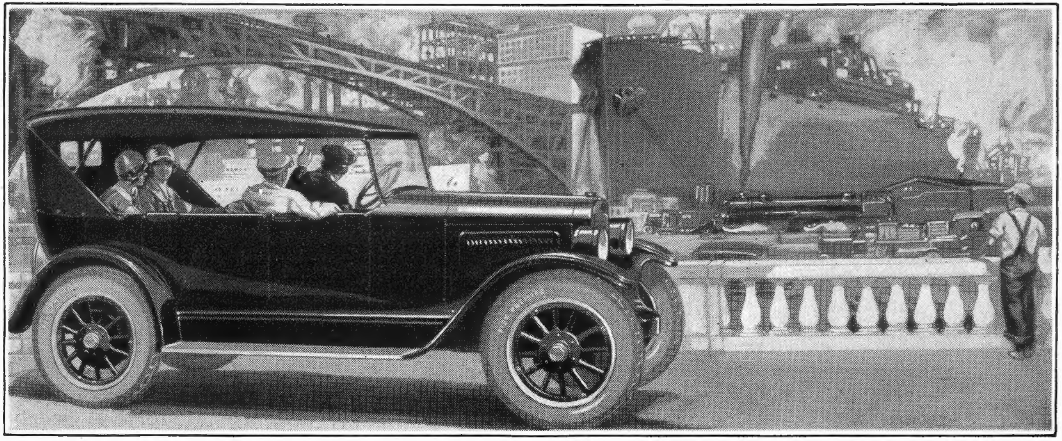
CHUCKLING GOLD ***An Incident in the Affairs of Mohamed Ali*** — ***George E. Holt***
Sid Hamed Mortadi takes an eye for an eye.

THE THREE MISSING MEN — ***Alan LeMay***
"Speaking of mysteries of the sea—"

Still Farther Ahead

THE three issues following the next will contain *long stories* by Hugh Pendexter, Thomson Burtis, J. Allan Dunn, W. C. Tuttle, F. R. Buckley, Alvin F. Harlow & Chief Caupolican, Harold Lamb, Arthur D. Howden Smith and William P. Barron; and short stories by John Webb, Roy Snider, Alanson Skinner, Charles Tenney Jackson, F. St. Mars, Thomas Topham, William Byron Mowery, G. W. Barrington, Raymond S. Spears and Rolf Bennett; stories of aviators in the oil fields, slave traders on the Atlantic, cowboys on the Western range, guardsmen in old Italy, fur hunters in the snow country, sheriffs in Texas, vikings in Norway, adventurers the world around.

All Steel Adopted for Greater Safety



With Everlasting Baked Enamel Finish

Most motor car bodies are skeletons of wood, with thin sheets of steel nailed outside—whereas the Overland body is *all* steel, a frame of steel covered with steel—all steel, welded into one-piece solidity.

Wood collapses at a bending stress of 5,000 lbs. to the square inch—whereas steel will stand a stress of 35,000 lbs. to the square inch. That's the kind of strength and safety and durability Overland gives you!

—the *only* touring car under $800 with coachwork entirely of steel! Body by Budd, pioneer in steel bodies.

—the *only* touring car under $800 with a genuine finish of hard-baked enamel!

You can pour scalding water on this finish or scrub it with strong chemicals used to remove road tar—and even turn the scorching flame of a blow-torch on it without marring its gleaming beauty. A finish that keeps its good looks in spite of time, dirt and weather . . . In an age of steel, drive an all-steel reliable Overland!

Willys-Overland, Inc.
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The Only Woman on Board the Freighter

All the men were fighting for her favor. But she was thinking of the uncertain end of the voyage—of the meeting with her husband who had deserted her seven years ago and had lived in the tropics ever since. Aboard the ship the tension grew tighter—the men were jealous of each other; and the woman was worried, afraid. One day—but read this dramatic story of the sea yourself. It is called "The Sea Horses," written by Francis Brett Young and appearing in

Everybody's Magazine

—FOR OCTOBER

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—FIRST IN FICTION